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April 20, 1950

Mr. Lawrence E. Spivak
Publisher
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
570 Lexington Avenue
New York 22, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Spivak:

I am indeed happy to tell you that Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine has again been honored by the members of Mystery Writers of America in their vote for distinguished achievement in the mystery field during 1949. By nation-wide ballot of nearly three hundred MWA members, the Edgar Allan Poe Award for the year's outstanding contribution to the mystery short story goes to Ellery Queen, as editor of EQMM. The "Edgar" will be presented at MWA's Fourth Annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner tonight, which, as you know, is the 109th birthday of the detective story--the anniversary of the first publication of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Congratulations!

Sincerely,

Lawrence G. Blochman

Lawrence G. Blochman,
Executive Vice President,
Mystery Writers of America

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE: MARGERY ALLINGHAM

Ever since EQMM started its annual contests — 'way back in 1945 — we have been hoping that Margery Allingham would write a new Mr. Campion story just for us. Occasionally, we would drop a note to Margery, expressing our hope, and we must say she never actually discouraged us. So we kept on hoping.

Then last year Margery paid her first visit to America, and we all had lobster together for lunch — Margery, her husband more familiarly known as "Pip," her American literary agent Paul Reynolds, and one of Margery's most devoted admirers (meaning ourselves); and between the lobster and the dessert we asked Margery for the umpteenth time if she would write a new Campion tale for EQMM's Fifth Annual Contest. And darned if she didn't promise to do just that, and in front of witnesses!

And Margery was as good as her word — for which we shall be eternally grateful.

The new Campion story is one of those rare tales which Margery and Pip call a "natural." That is to say, quoting the author herself, it popped out of her mind fully fledged. That doesn't happen often to Margery, but when it does she usually likes the finished product. It's very odd, says Margery, how one can spend months and months struggling to think out a mystery plot and give shape to it, and not come up with anything really good; and yet sometimes the whole story, down to the last detail, just springs — "like Athena from the head of Zeus, fully grown and armed to the teeth" — out of the mind, sits up, and begs to be written. Then, too, all her life, Margery has been terrified by the sight of old ladies gloating over their precious old furniture and family heirlooms . . .

ONE MORNING THEY'LL HANG HIM

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

IT WAS typical of Detective Inspector Kenny, at that time D.D.I. of the L. Division, that, having forced himself to ask a favor, he should set about it with the worst grace possible. When at last he took the plunge, he heaved his two hundred pounds off Mr. Campion's fireside couch and set down his empty glass with a clatter.

"I don't know if I needed that at three in the afternoon," he said ungratefully, his small blue eyes baleful, "but I've been up since two this morning dealing with women, tears, minor

miracles, and this perishing rain." He rubbed his broad face, and presented it scarlet and exasperated at Mr. Campion's back. "If there's one thing that makes me savage it's futility!" he added.

Mr. Albert Campion, who had been staring idly out of the window watching the rain on the roofs, did not glance round. He was still the lean, somewhat ineffectual-looking man to whom the Special Branch had turned so often in the last twenty years. His very fair hair had bleached into whiteness and a few lines had appeared round the pale eyes which were still, as always, covered by large horn-rimmed spectacles, but otherwise he looked much as Kenny first remembered him — "Friendly and a little simple — the old snake!"

"So there's futility in Barraclough Road too, is there?" Campion's light voice sounded polite rather than curious.

Kenny drew a sharp breath of annoyance.

"The Commissioner has 'phoned you? He suggested I should look you up. It's not a great matter — just one of those stupid little snags which has some perfectly obvious explanation. Once it's settled the whole case is open-and-shut. As it is, we can't keep the man at the station indefinitely."

Mr. Campion picked up the early edition of the evening paper from his desk.

"This is all I know," he said, holding it out. "Mr. Oates didn't 'phone. There you are, in the Stop Press. *Rich Widow shot in Barraclough Road West. Nephew at police station helping investigation.* What's the difficulty? His help is not altogether wholehearted, perhaps?"

To his surprise an expression remarkably like regret flickered round Kenny's narrow lips.

"Ruddy young fool," he said, and sat down abruptly. "I tell you, Mr. Campion, this thing is in the bag. It's just one of those ordinary, rather depressing little stories which most murder cases are. There's practically no mystery, no chase — nothing but a wretched little tragedy. As soon as you've spotted what I've missed, I shall charge this chap and he'll go before the magistrates and be committed for trial. His counsel will plead insanity and the jury won't have it. The Judge will sentence him, he'll appeal, their Lordships will dismiss it. The Home Secretary will sign the warrant and one morning they'll take him out and they'll hang him." He sighed. "All for nothing," he said. "All for nothing at all. It'll probably be raining just like it is now," he added inconsequentially.

Mr. Campion's eyes grew puzzled. He knew Kenny for a conscientious officer and, some said, a hard man. This philosophic strain was unlike him.

"Taken a fancy to him?" he inquired.

"Who? Me? I certainly haven't." The Inspector was grim. "I've got no sympathy for youngsters who shoot up their relatives however selfish the

old besoms may be. No, he's killed her and he must take what's coming to him, but it's hard on — well, on some people. Me, for one." He took out a large old-fashioned notebook and folded it carefully in half. "I stick to one of these," he remarked virtuously. "None of your backs of envelopes for me. My record is kept as neatly as when I was first on the beat, and it can be handed across the court whenever a know-all counsel asks to see it." He paused. "I sound like an advertisement, don't I? Well, Mr. Campion, since I'm here, just give your mind to this, if you will. I don't suppose it'll present any difficulty to you."

"One never knows," murmured Mr. Campion idiotically. "Start with the victim."

Kenny returned to his notebook.

"Mrs. Mary Alice Cibber, aged about seventy or maybe a bit less. She had heart trouble which made her look frail and, of course, I didn't see her until she was dead. She had a nice house in Barraclough Road, a good deal too big for her, left her by her husband who died ten years ago. Since then she's been alone except for a maid who cleared off in the war and now for another old party who calls herself a companion. *She* looks older still, poor old girl, but you can see she's been kept well under —" he put his thumb down expressively — "by Mrs. C. who appears to have been a dictator in her small way. She was the sort of woman who lived for two chairs and a salad bowl."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Antiques." He was mildly contemptuous. "The house is crammed with them, all three floors and the attic, everything kept as if it was brand-new. The old companion says she loved it more than anything on earth. Of course she hadn't much else *to* love, not a relation in the world except the nephew —"

"Whose future you see so clearly?"

"The man who shot her," the Inspector agreed. "He's a big, nervy lad, name of Woodruff, the son of the old lady's brother. His mother, father, and two young sisters all got theirs in the blitz on Portsmouth. Whole family wiped out."

"I see." Campion began to catch some of Kenny's depression. "Where was he when that happened?"

"In the Western Desert." The D.D.I.'s protruberant eyes were dark with irritation. "I told you this was just an ordinary miserable slice of life. It goes on the same way. This boy, Richard Woodruff — he's only twenty-eight now — did very well in the war. He was in the landings in Sicily and went through the fighting in Italy where he got the M.C. and was promoted major. Then he copped in for the breakthrough in France and just before the finish he became a casualty. A bridge blew up with him on it — or something of the sort, my informant didn't know exactly — and he seems to have become what the boys call 'bomb happy.' It used to be 'shell shock' in my day. As far as I can gather, he always had been

quick-tempered, but this sent him over the edge. He sounds to me as if he wasn't safe for a while. That may help him in his defense, of course."

"Yes." Campion sounded depressed. "Where's he been since then?"

"On a farm mostly. He was training to be an architect before the war but the motherly old Army knew what was best for him and when he came out of the hospital they bunged him down to Dorset. He's just got away. Some wartime buddy got him a job in an architect's office under the old pals' act and he was all set to take it up." He paused and his narrow mouth, which was not entirely insensitive, twisted bitterly. "Ought to have started Monday," he said.

"Oh, dear," murmured Mr. Campion inadequately. "Why did he shoot his aunt? Pure bad temper?"

Kenny shook his head.

"He had a reason. I mean one can see why he was angry. He hadn't anywhere to live, you see. As you know London is crowded, and rents are fantastic. He and his wife were paying through the nose for a cupboard of a bed-sitting room off the Edgware Road."

"His wife?" The lean man in the horn-rims was interested. "Where did she come from? You're keeping her very quiet."

To Campion's surprise the Inspector did not speak at once. Instead he grunted and there was regret, and surprise at it, in his little smile. "I believe I would if I could," he said sincerely. "He found her on the farm. They've been married six weeks. I don't know if you've ever seen love, Mr. Campion? It's very rare — the kind I mean." He put out his hands deprecatingly. "It seems to crop up — when it does — among the most unexpected people, and when you do see it, well, it's very impressive." He succeeded in looking thoroughly ashamed of himself. "I shouldn't call myself a sentimental man," he said.

"No." Campion was reassuring. "You got his war history from her, I suppose?"

"I had to, but we're confirming it. He's as shut up as a watch — or a hand grenade. 'Yes' and 'No' and 'I did not shoot her' — that's about all his contribution amounted to, and he's had a few hours of expert treatment. The girl is quite different. She's down there too. Won't leave. We put her in the waiting room finally. She's not difficult — just sits there."

"Does she know anything about it?"

"No." Kenny was quite definite. "She's nothing to look at," he went on presently, as if he felt the point should be made. "She's just an ordinary nice little country girl, a bit too thin and a bit too brown, natural hair and inexpert make-up, and yet with this — this blazing, radiant steadfastness about her!" He checked himself. "Well, she's fond of him," he amended.

"Believes he's God," Campion suggested.

Kenny shook his head. "She doesn't care if he isn't," he said sadly. "Well,

Mr. Campion, some weeks ago these two approached Mrs. Cibber about letting them have a room or two at the top of her house. That must have been the girl's idea; she's just the type to have old-fashioned notions about blood being thicker than water. She made the boy write. The old lady ignored the question but asked them both to an evening meal last night. That invitation was sent a fortnight ago, so you can see there was no eager bless-you-my-children about it."

"Any reason for the delay?"

"Only that she had to have notice if she was giving a party. The old companion explained that to me. There was the silver to get out and clean, and the best china to be washed, and so on. Oh, there was nothing simple and homely about that household!" He sounded personally affronted. "When they got there, of course there was a blazing row."

"Hard words or flying crockery?"

Kenny hesitated. "In a way, both," he said slowly. "It seems to have been a funny sort of flare-up. I had two accounts of it — one from the girl and one from the companion. I think they are both trying to be truthful but they both seem to have been completely foxed by it. They both agree that Mrs. Cibber began it. She waited until there were three oranges and a hundredweight of priceless early Worcester dessert service on the table, and then let fly. Her theme seems to have been the impudence of Youth in casting its eyes on its inheritance before Age was in its grave, and so on and so on. She then made it quite clear that they hadn't a solitary hope of getting what they wanted, and conveyed that she did not care if they slept in the street so long as her precious furniture was safely housed. There's no doubt about it that she was very aggravating and unfair."

"Unfair?"

"Ungenerous. After all she knew the man quite well. He used to go and stay with her by himself when he was a little boy." Kenny returned to his notes. "Woodruff then lost his temper in his own way which, if the exhibition he gave in the early hours of this morning is typical, is impressive. He goes white instead of red, says practically nothing, but looks as if he's about to 'incandesce' — if I make myself plain."

"Entirely." Mr. Campion was deeply interested. This new and human Kenny was an experience. "I take it he then fished out a gun and shot her?"

"Lord, no! If he had, he'd have a chance at least of Broadmoor. No. He just got up and asked her if she had any of his things, because if so he'd take them and not inconvenience her with them any longer. It appears that when he was in hospital some of his gear had been sent to her, as his next of kin. She said yes, she had, and it was waiting for him in the boot cupboard. The old companion, Miss Smith, was sent trotting out to fetch it and came staggering in with an old officers' hold-all, bursted at the sides and filthy. Mrs. Cibber told her

nephew to open it and see if she'd robbed him, and he did as he was told. Of course, one of the first things he saw among the ragged bush shirts and old photographs was a revolver and a clip of ammunition." He paused and shook his head. "Don't ask me how it got there. You know what hospitals were like in the war. Mrs. Cibber went on taunting the man in her own peculiar way, and he stood there examining the gun and presently loading it, almost absently. You can see the scene?"

Campion could. The pleasant, perhaps slightly overcrowded room was vivid in his mind, and he saw the gentle light on the china and the proud, bitter face of the woman.

"After that," said Kenny, "the tale gets more peculiar, although both accounts agree. It was Mrs. C. who laughed and said, 'I suppose you think I ought to be shot?' Woodruff did not answer but he dropped the gun in his side pocket. Then he packed up the hold-all and said 'Goodbye.'" He hesitated. "Both statements say that he then said something about *the sun having gone down.* I don't know what that meant, or if both women mistook him. Anyway, there's nothing to it. He has no explanation to offer. Says he doesn't remember saying it. However, after that he suddenly picked up one of his aunt's beloved china fruit-bowls and simply dropped it on the floor. It fell on a rug, as it happened, and did not break, but old Mrs. Cibber nearly passed out, and the girl hurried him off home."

"With the gun?"

"With the gun." Kenny shrugged his heavy shoulders. "As soon as the girl heard that Mrs. Cibber had been shot, she jumped up with a tale that he had *not* taken it. She said she'd sneaked it out of his pocket and put it on the window sill. The lamest story you ever heard! She's game and she's ready to say absolutely anything, but she won't save him, poor kid. He was seen in the district at midnight."

Mr. Campion put a hand through his sleek hair. "Ah. That rather tears it."

"Oh, it does. There's no question that he did it. It hardly arises. What happened was this. The young folk got back to their bed-sitting room about ten to nine. Neither of them will admit it, but it's obvious that Woodruff was in one of those boiling but sulky rages which made him unfit for human society. The girl left him alone — I should say she has a gift for handling him — and she says she went to bed while he sat up writing letters. Quite late, she can't or won't say when, he went out to the post. He won't say anything. We may or may not break him down, he's a queer chap. However, we have a witness who saw him somewhere about midnight at the Kilburn end of Barraclough Road. Woodruff stopped him and asked if the last eastbound 'bus had gone. Neither of them had a watch, but the witness is prepared to swear it was just after midnight — which is important because the shot was fired at two minutes before

twelve. We've gotten that time fixed."

Mr. Campion, who had been making notes, looked up in mild astonishment.

"You got that witness very promptly," he remarked. "Why did he come forward?"

"He was a plainclothesman off duty," said Kenny calmly. "One of the local men who had been out to a reunion dinner. He wasn't tight but he had decided to walk home before his wife saw him. I don't know why he hadn't a watch" — Kenny frowned at this defect — "anyway, he hadn't, or it wasn't going. But he was alert enough to notice Woodruff. He's a distinctive chap, you know. Very tall and dark, and his manner was so nervy and excitable that the dick thought it worth reporting."

Campion's teeth appeared in a brief smile.

"In fact, he recognized him at once as a man who looked as though he'd done a murder?"

"No." The Inspector remained unruffled. "No, he said he looked like a chap who had just got something off his mind and was pleased with himself."

"I see. And meanwhile the shot was fired at two minutes to twelve."

"That's certain." Kenny brightened and became businesslike. "The man next door heard it and looked at his watch. We've got his statement and the old lady's companion. Everyone else in the street is being questioned, but nothing has come in yet. It was a cold wet night and most people had their windows shut; besides, the room where the murder took place was heavily curtained. So far, these two are the only people who seem to have heard anything at all. The man next door woke up and nudged his wife who had slept through it. But then he may have dozed again, for the next thing he remembers is hearing screams for help. By the time he got to the window, the companion was out in the street in her dressing gown, wedged in between the lamp post and the mail box, screeching her little gray head off. The rain was coming down in sheets."

"When exactly was this?"

"Almost immediately after the shot, according to the companion. She had been in bed for some hours and had slept. Her room is on the second floor, at the back. Mrs. Cibber had not come up with her but had settled down at her bureau in the drawing-room, as she often did in the evening. Mrs. C. was still very upset by the scene at the meal, and did not want to talk. Miss Smith says she woke up and thought she heard the front door open. She won't swear to this, and at any rate she thought nothing of it, for Mrs. Cibber often slipped out to the mail box with letters before coming to bed. Exactly how long it was after she woke that she heard the shot she does not know, but it brought her scrambling out of bed. She agrees she might have been a minute or two finding her slippers and a wrapper, but she certainly came down right away. She says she found

the street door open, letting in the rain, and the drawing-room door, which is next to it, wide open as well, and the lights in there full on." He referred to his notes and began to read aloud. " 'I smelled burning' — she means cordite — 'and I glanced across the room to see poor Mrs. Cibber on the floor with a dreadful hole in her forehead. I was too frightened to go near her, so I ran out of the house shouting "Murder! Thieves!" ' "

"That's nice and old-fashioned. Did she see anybody?"

"She says not, and I believe her. She was directly under the only lamp post for fifty yards and it was certainly raining hard."

Mr. Campion appeared satisfied but unhappy. When he spoke his voice was very gentle.

"Do I understand that your case is that Woodruff came back, tapped on the front door, and was admitted by his aunt; after some conversation, which must have taken place in lowered tones since the companion upstairs did not hear it, he shot her and ran away, leaving all the doors open?"

"Substantially, yes. Although he may have shot her as soon as he saw her."

"In that case she'd have been found dead in the hall."

Kenny blinked. "Yes, I suppose she would. Still, they couldn't have talked much."

"Why?"

The Inspector made a gesture of distaste. "This is the bit which gets under my skin," he said. "They could hardly have spoken long — *because she'd forgiven him.* She had written to her solicitor — the finished letter was on her writing pad ready for the post. She'd written to say she was thinking of making the upper part of her house into a home for her nephew, and asked if there was a clause in her lease to prevent it. She also said she wanted the work done quickly, as she had taken a fancy to her new niece and hoped in time there might be children. It's pathetic, isn't it?" His eyes were wretched. "That's what I meant by futility. She'd forgiven him, see? She wasn't a mean old harridan, she was just quick-tempered. I told you this isn't a mystery tale, this is ordinary sordid life."

Mr. Campion looked away.

"Tragic," he said. "Yes. A horrid thing. What do you want me to do?"

Kenny sighed. "Find the gun," he murmured.

The lean man whistled.

"You'll certainly need that if you're to be sure of a conviction. How did you lose it?"

"He's ditched it somewhere. He didn't get rid of it in Barraclough Road because the houses come right down to the street, and our chaps were searching for it within half an hour. At the end of the road he caught the last 'bus, which ought to come along at midnight but was a bit late last night, I'm morally certain. These drivers make up time on the straight stretch by the park; it's more than their jobs are worth, so you never get them to admit it. Anyhow, he didn't

leave the gun on the 'bus, and it's not in the house where his room is. It's not in the old lady's house at 81 Barraclough Road because I've been over that house myself." He peered at the taller man hopefully. "Where would you hide a gun in this city at night, if you were all that way from the river? It's not so easy, is it? If it had been anywhere obvious it would have turned up by now."

"He may have given it to someone."

"And risked blackmail?" Kenny laughed. "He's not as dumb as that. You'll have to see him. He says he never had it — but that's only natural. Yet where did he put it, Mr. Campion? It's only a little point but, as you say, it's got to be solved."

Campion grimaced.

"Anywhere, Kenny. Absolutely anywhere. In a drain —"

"They're narrow gratings in Barraclough Road."

"In a sandbin or a static water tank —"

"There aren't any in that district."

"He threw it down in the street and someone, who felt he'd rather like to have a gun, picked it up. Your area isn't peopled solely with the law-abiding, you know."

Kenny became more serious. "That's the real likelihood," he admitted gloomily. "But all the same, I don't believe he's the type to throw away a gun casually. He's too intelligent, too cautious. Do you know how this war has made some men cautious even when they're being the most reckless? He's one of those. He's hidden it. Where? Mr. Oates said you'd know if anyone did."

Campion ignored this blatant flattery. He stood staring absently out of the window for so long that the Inspector was tempted to nudge him, and when at last he spoke, his question did not sound promising.

"How often did he stay with his aunt when he was a child?"

"Quite a bit, I think, but there's no kid's hiding-place there that only he could have known, if that's what you're after." Kenny could hardly conceal his disappointment. "It's not that kind of house. Besides, he hadn't the time. He got back about twenty past twelve; a woman in the house confirms it — she met him on the stairs. He was certainly spark-out when we got there at a quarter after four this morning. They were both sleeping like kids when I first saw them. She had one skinny little brown arm round his neck. He just woke up in a rage, and she was more astounded than frightened, I swear —"

Mr. Campion had ceased to listen.

"Without the gun the only real evidence you've got is the plain-clothesman's story of meeting him," he said. "And even you admit that gallant officer was walking for his health after a party. Imagine a good defense lawyer enlarging on that point."

"I have," the Inspector agreed, dryly. "That's why I'm here. You must find the gun for us, sir. Can I fetch you a raincoat? Or," he added,

a faintly smug expression flickering over his broad face, "will you just sit in your armchair and do it there?"

To his annoyance his elegant host appeared to consider the question.

"No, perhaps I'd better come with you," he said at last. "We'll go to Barraclough Road first, if you don't mind. And if I might make a suggestion, I should send Woodruff and his wife back to their lodgings — suitably escorted, of course. If the young man was going to crack, I think he would have done so by now, and the gun, wherever it is, can hardly be at the police station."

Kenny considered. "He may give himself away and lead us to it," he agreed, although without enthusiasm. "I'll telephone. Then we'll go anywhere you say, but as I told you I've been over the Barraclough Road house myself and if there's anything there it's high time I retired."

Mr. Campion merely looked foolish, and the Inspector sighed and let him have his way.

He came back from the telephone smiling wryly.

"That's settled," he announced. "He's been behaving like a good soldier interrogated by the enemy, silly young fool — after all, we're only trying to hang him! The girl has been asking for him to be fed, and reporters are crawling up the walls. Our boys won't be sorry to get rid of 'em for a bit. They'll be looked after. We shan't lose 'em. Now, if you've set your heart on the scene of the crime, Mr. Campion, we'll go."

In the taxi he advanced a little idea.

"I was thinking of that remark he is alleged to have made," he said, not without shame. "You don't think that it could have been 'Your sun has gone down,' and that we could construe it as a threat within the meaning of the act?"

Campion regarded him owlishly.

"We could, but I don't think we will. That's the most enlightening part of the whole story, don't you think?"

If Inspector Kenny agreed he did not say so, and they drove to the top of Barraclough Road in silence. There Campion insisted on stopping at the first house next to the main thoroughfare. The building had traded on its proximity to the shopping centre and had been converted into a dispensing chemist's. Campion was inside for several minutes, leaving Kenny in the cab. When he came out he offered no explanation other than to observe fatuously that they had a "nice time," and settled back without troubling to look out at the early Victorian stucco three-storey houses which lined the broad road.

A man on duty outside, and a handful of idlers gaping apathetically at the drawn blinds, distinguished 81 Barraclough Road. Kenny rang the bell and the door was opened after a pause by a flurried old lady with a duster in her hand.

"Oh, it's you, Inspector," she said hastily. "I'm afraid you've found me in a muddle. I've been trying to tidy up a little. *She* couldn't have borne

the place left dirty after everyone had been trampling over it. Yet I don't mean to say that you weren't all very careful."

She led them into a spotless dining-room which glowed with old mahogany and limpid silver, and the wan afternoon light showed them her reddened eyes and worn navy-blue housedress. She was a timid-looking person, not quite so old as Kenny had suggested, with very neat gray hair and a skin which had never known cosmetics. Her expression was closed and secret with long submission, and her shoulder blades stuck out a little under the cloth of her dress. Her hands still trembled slightly from the shock of the evening before.

Kenny introduced Campion. "We shan't be long, Miss Smith," he said cheerfully. "Just going to have another little look around."

Campion smiled at her reassuringly. "It's difficult to get help these days?" he suggested pleasantly.

"Oh, it is," she said earnestly. "And Mrs. Cibber wouldn't trust just anyone with her treasures. They are so very good." Her eyes filled with tears. "She was so fond of them."

"I daresay she was. That's a beautiful piece, for instance." Campion glanced with expert interest at the serpentine sideboard with its genuine handles and toilet cupboard.

"Beautiful," echoed Miss Smith dutifully. "And the chairs, you see?"

"I do." He eyed the Trafalgar set with the cherry-leather seats. "Is this where the quarrel took place?"

She nodded and trembled afresh. "Yes. I — I shall never forget it, never."

"Was Mrs. Cibber often bad-tempered?"

The woman hesitated, and her firm small mouth moved without words.

"Was she?"

She shot a swift unhappy glance at him.

"She was quick," she said. "Yes, I think I ought to say she was quick. Now, would you like to see the rest of the house or —?"

Campion glanced at his watch and compared it with the Tompion bracket clock on the mantelshelf.

"I think we've just time," he said, idiotically. "Upstairs first, Inspector."

The next thirty-five minutes reduced Kenny to a state of jitters rare in him. After watching Campion with breathless interest for the first five, it slowly dawned on him that the expert had forgotten the crime in his delight at discovering a treasure trove. Even Miss Smith, who betrayed a certain proprietorial pride, flagged before Campion's insatiable interest. Once or twice she hinted that perhaps they ought to go down, but he would not hear of it. By the time they had exhausted the third floor and were on the steps to the attic, she became almost firm. There was really nothing there but some early Georgian children's toys, she said.

"But I must just see the toys. I've got a 'thing' on toys, Kenny." Cam-

pion sounded ecstatic. "Just a minute —"

A vigorous tattoo on the front door interrupted him and Miss Smith, whose nerves were suffering, emitted a little squeak.

"Oh, dear. Somebody at the door. I must go down."

"No, no." Campion was uncharacteristically effusive. "I'll see who it is and come back. I shan't be a moment."

He flung himself downstairs with boyish enthusiasm, Miss Smith behind him, and Kenny, seeing escape at last, following quickly.

They reached the hall just in time to see him closing the door. "Only the post," he said, holding out a package. "Your library book, Miss Smith."

"Oh, yes," she came forward, hand outstretched. "I was expecting that."

"I rather thought you were." His voice was very soft and suddenly menacing. He held the cardboard book box high over his head with one hand, and with the other released the flap which closed it. The soft gleam of metal appeared in the light from the transom, and a service revolver crashed heavily to the parquet floor.

For a long minute there was utter silence.

Miss Smith appeared frozen in mid air, her hands clawing at the box.

Then, most dreadfully, she began to scream . . .

. .

A little over an hour later Kenny sat on a Trafalgar chair in a room which still seemed to quiver and shudder with terrible sound. He was pale and tired-looking. His shirt was torn and there were three livid nail scratches down his face.

"God," he said, breathing hard. "God, can you beat that?"

Mr. Campion sat on the priceless table and scratched his ear.

"It was a bit more than I bargained for," he murmured. "It didn't occur to me that she'd become violent. I'm afraid they may be having trouble in the van. Sorry. I ought to have thought of it."

The C.I.D. man grunted. "Seems to me you thought of plenty," he muttered. "It came as a shock to me — I don't mind admitting it since I can't very well help it. When did it come to you? Did you have it from the start?"

"Oh, Lord, no." Campion sounded apologetic. "It was that remark of Woodruff's you quoted about the sun going down. That's what set me on the train of thought. Weren't you ever warned as a kid, Kenny, and by an aunt perhaps, never to let the sun go down on your wrath?"

"I've heard it, of course. What do you mean? It was a sort of saying between them?"

"I wondered if it was. They knew each other well when he was a child, and they were both quick-tempered people. It seemed to me that he was reminding her that the sun *had* gone down, and he showed her he could have smashed her precious bowl if he liked. It would have broken, you

know, if he hadn't taken care it shouldn't. I wondered if, like many quick-tempered people, they got sorry just as quickly. Didn't you think it odd, Kenny, that directly after the row they should *both* have settled down to write letters?"

The detective stared at him.

"She wrote to her solicitor," he began slowly. "And he —? Good Lord! You think he wrote to her to say he was sorry?"

"Almost certainly, but we shall never find his letter. That's in the kitchen stove by now. He came back to deliver it, pushed it through the door, and hurried off looking, just as your plainclothesman said, as if he'd got something off his chest. Then he could sleep. The sun had not gone down on his wrath." He slid off the table and stood up. "The vital point is, of course, that *Mrs. Cibber knew he would.* She sat up waiting for it."

Kenny sucked in his breath.

"And Miss Smith knew?"

"Of course, she knew. Mrs. Cibber hadn't the kind of temperament one can keep a secret. Miss Smith knew from the moment that Mrs. Cibber received the initial letter that the nephew would get his way in the end — *unless she could stop it somehow!* She was the one with the bee in her bonnet about the furniture. I realized that as soon as you said the whole house was kept like a bandbox. No woman with a weak heart can keep a three-storey house like a palace, or compel another to do it — unless the other wants to. Miss Smith was the one with the mania. Who was to get the house if the nephew died in the war? Mrs. Cibber must have made some provision."

Kenny rubbed his head with both hands. "I knew!" he exploded. "The lawyer's clerk told me this morning when I rang up to find out if Woodruff was the heir. I was so keen to confirm that point that I discounted the rest. If he died the companion was to have it for her lifetime."

Campion looked relieved.

"I thought so. There you are, you see. She had to get rid of them both — Woodruff and his new wife. With a young and vigorous woman in the house there was a danger of the companion becoming — well, redundant. Don't you think?"

Kenny was fingering his notebook.

"You think she'd planned it for a fortnight?"

"She'd thought of it for a fortnight. She didn't see how to do it until the row occurred last night. When she found the gun on the window sill, where young Mrs. Woodruff left it, and Mrs. Cibber told her that the boy would come back, the plan was obvious." He shivered. "Do you realize that she must have been waiting, probably on the stairs, with the gun in one hand and the book box addressed to herself in the other, listening for Woodruff's letter to slide under the door? As soon as she heard it, she had to fly down and get it and open the door. Then she had to walk into the drawing-room, shoot the old lady as she turned to see who it was,

and put the gun in the book box. The instant she was certain Mrs. Cibber was dead, she then had to run out screaming to her place between the lamp post and the mail box and — *post the package!*"

Kenny put down his pencil and looked up.

"Now there," he said with honest admiration, "there I hand it to you. How in the world did you get on to that?"

"You suggested it."

"*I* did?" Kenny was pleased in spite of himself. "When?"

"When you kept asking me where one could hide a gun in a London street with no wide gratings and no sandbins. There was only the mail box. I guessed she'd posted it to herself — no one else would have been safe. Even the dead letter office eventually gives up its dead. That's why I was so keen to get her to the top of the house — as far away from the front door as possible." He sighed. "The book box was misguided genius. The gun was an old Luger, did you notice? Loot. That's why he never had to turn it in. It just fitted in the box. She must have had a thrill when she discovered that."

Kenny shook his head wonderingly. "Well, blow me down!" he said inelegantly. "Funny that *I* put you onto it!"

Mr. Campion was in bed that night when the telephone rang. It was Kenny again.

"I say, Mr. Campion?"

"Yes?"

"Sorry to bother you at this time of night but there's something worrying me. You don't mind, do you?"

"Think nothing of it."

"Well. Everything is all right. Smith has been certified by three medicos. The little girl is very happy comforting her boy, who seems to be upset about his aunt's death. The Commissioner is very pleased. But I can't get off to sleep. Mr. Campion, *how did you know what time the afternoon post is delivered in Barraclough Road?*"

The lean man stifled a yawn.

"Because I went into the chemist's shop on the corner and asked," he said. "Elementary, my dear Kenny."

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Because of the large number of reader requests, *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE* has procured a supply of strong, handsome binders for your copies of *EQMM*. Each binder holds one complete volume — that is, six issues of the magazine. It is easy to use, handy, convenient, and economical. The price is $1.00 postpaid. Send your order and remittance to: Special Binder Dept., Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, New York.

WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

For many years Miriam Allen deFord has had occasions to visit state prisons, especially in California. In the 1920s she was requested by Tom Mooney to write his biography; unfortunately, it was never published. Several times she was granted interviews by a certain famous Warden — once, for example, when Miss deFord wrote an article on Louise Peete, the double murderess, and again when she did a piece on music in prisons, a study which won second prize in the national contest sponsored by the American Music Conference. Each succeeding time, Miss deFord became more and more impressed with the remarkable work in rehabilitation and humanization being accomplished by that progressive Warden.

So, you see, Miss deFord knows her prisons — from the outside looking in, we hasten to remind you. It was both natural and inevitable, therefore, that Miss deFord would find a prison background growing more and more insistent in her mind as the setting for a detective story. The penitentiary locale is not in itself a new thought — many writers have explored this scene for criminous chronicles. But Miss deFord did conceive a brand-new wrinkle: so far as we know, she is the first writer to build a story around the idea of a convict acting as a detective, while still serving his sentence behind iron bars and within stone walls. That is a classic conception — a startling and important variation in the eternal search for a new type of detective character.

"I MURDERED A MAN"

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

"THIS is the sort of thing I warned you about," said Warden Vail, handing the manuscript back. "When your pupils are convicts, naturally their minds run on crime. Don't be embarrassed, though," he added kindly, seeing the chagrin on Gordon Graham's face. "You're doing a fine job, and you're proving my thesis that there's just as much talent to be found inside a penitentiary as outside it. Only, you mustn't take as serious confession every fanciful piece an imaginative man writes for you."

"It was just that it sounded so sincere and circumstantial," Gordon Graham said. "It worried me. I began to wonder if I hadn't stumbled on something of possible use to you."

"It *is* of use to me. I'm trying to rehabilitate these men, not punish them, and anything that shows me

how their minds work is good to have. But in this case — this young man, A-78425 — what's his name? Ellerby — nothing he's written here has the slightest connection with any real murder, believe me. You've let your own novelist's imagination run away with you. Look, don't you see any discrepancies yourself?"

"Well, I suppose I do, really, now that you call my attention to them. For one thing, there's no motivation. If this were an account of a real murder he'd committed, he'd find some excuse for himself, give some idea of why he did it. This is just a sort of case-history résumé — even the exact method is only hinted at."

"Yes, and there's another point that's even more important. See here — 'I Murdered a Man,' it's called. It starts out — here, let me look at it again." He reached for the manuscript, and put on the spectacles which gave him the look of a kindly, elderly owl. " 'I murdered a man in cold blood and got away with it.' You say you told your class to write a short piece narrating some personal experience. But the 'I' in this thing goes on to tell how he tried to kill his brother when they were boys, how later on he tried to kill him just after his marriage, and how he finally, 'by a method learned from a book,' succeeded in killing him and in having the thing passed off as a natural death, so that even the victim's own son had no suspicion."

Graham rose and looked over the Warden's shoulder. He nodded agreement. Vail went on. "Now, I know all about this young Ellerby, now that you've reminded me of him. You can see for yourself that he's hardly more than a kid — twenty or so. To begin with, you'll probably find that he had no brother. To end with, he wouldn't be likely to have a brother old enough to possess a son of such an age that he could have any suspicion of murder.

"Ellerby's in here for negligent manslaughter — he ran over a child and killed her, and then drove away without stopping. They got him by tracing the glass from a broken headlight. He hadn't even been drinking, and as I remember, he put up practically no defense and gave no explanation.

"He's got money — he'd just inherited a tidy fortune from his father — he was a junior at the university, a bit superior in his manner, and his apparent lack of emotion at the trial antagonized everybody — even his own lawyer — and made him seem callous instead of remorseful. The kid he killed was a little girl from a poor Mexican family. Her mother came into court to testify with six other youngsters around her, all in tears. So he got one to ten years, and he's nearly served his first year and is about ready to have his final sentence determined. There was a civil suit, too, and he had to pay heavy damages.

"He doesn't seem like a particularly pleasant fellow, though he may just have an unfortunate manner and be unable to show what he really feels. But you can take my word for it, he hasn't committed any premeditated

murders. Mark his paper for him and tell him not to let his imagination run away with him next time."

Graham, the novelist, smiled the polite smile of a volunteer worker under instruction from his superior, and took the paper back. But at the office door he hesitated.

"Mr. Vail," he said, "you're probably entirely right about this. As you say, I write fiction myself and perhaps I read more into things like this than they have in them. But there's just one thing that still bothers me."

"Go ahead."

"You say he'd just inherited a lot of money from his father. For 'brother,' in this story, could you read 'father'? In other words, how did his father die?"

The Warden laughed.

"You hate to give up, don't you, Graham? Well, he could hardly have tried to kill his father when the father was a boy, or just after his marriage, could he? And as a matter of fact, I happen to remember a good deal about the case — I read about it at the time and refreshed my memory when Ellerby came here. His father was a retired engineer who died of heart disease. His mother had been dead since the boy was small. No, Graham" — the Warden shook his head — "it won't wash. He seemed devoted to his father, and I have an idea that the whole trouble that brought him here arose out of his very grief — that he was in a sort of daze when he struck the child. It was only a week or so after his father died. He struck me, in the only interview I had with him, as a very quiet, reserved fellow, not at all the sort to lose his head and run away like that under normal circumstances; and he'd never been in any kind of difficulty before. In fact, when the board meets I'm going to recommend a light sentence — in my opinion he's been punished enough."

Graham turned back to the door. Then he hesitated again.

"Would you have any objection, Warden, to my talking to him privately about this story, trying to find out just why he wrote it? Everything you say sounds right, and yet I still have an uneasy feeling that if this wasn't a confession — as it wasn't, I see now — it was a sort of message, perhaps a kind of indirect appeal."

"Talk to him all you like. I'll see that he gets permission to stay after class till late lockup, if you want. But mark my words, you'll find out that the only message in this thing is a very natural one — the desire of a young man, who after all is a bit different in background and interests from most of the men here — I understand he's not very popular among his fellow-prisoners — to attract the attention of his teacher and get a little special consideration."

The Warden chuckled as the door closed. "And that goes for you too, Mr. Graham," he murmured to himself as he went back to his paper work.

He would have been less sure of himself if he could have heard the conversation between Gordon Gra-

ham and young Wade Ellerby, A-78425.

Ellerby was tall and thin, and his blue prison uniform fitted him neatly. His dark young face was serious, and his incongruously light eyes were somber under his knitted black brows. He stood head and shoulders over the stocky, blond author.

"Why did you ask me that?" he began abruptly. "Why should you ask if this is just fiction?"

"Because I'm not sure whether it is or not," answered Graham quietly. "To be frank with you, I was struck by it so forcibly that the day after you handed it in at last week's class I went to Warden Vail and talked to him about it."

"And what did he say?"

"He laughed at me and insisted it was purely imaginary."

"But you still don't think so?"

"I'm not sure, Ellerby. That's why I'm bringing it up now. If it is, I'll tell you as a fairly successful writer that I've discovered a new talent worth cultivating. I couldn't forget the story — it has intensity and compulsion in it. If you made it up out of the whole cloth, you've got a literary future before you."

Wade Ellerby smiled thinly.

"I'd like to be able to accept that compliment," he said. "But I don't deserve it. If you found all those things in what I wrote, it's because I was telling the plain truth."

"You mean —"

"No, I don't mean I murdered my brother. I never had one. I mean that — someone else murdered *his* brother, and I think I know how and why, and I can't do a thing about it unless I can get help."

"Suppose you tell me."

"Put yourself in my place. Here I am — for how long I don't know. I've had plenty of bad luck in my life, though I'm not twenty-one yet, but the very worst was having that accident happen just when it did. It's all tied up together, and it's hard to explain. Mr. Graham, when I ran over that child my mind was a million miles away. I'd just found out some things — and figured some other things out — enough to be sure of a murder. It was a week after my dad died — did you know I was the one who found him, a friend of mine from the university and I, lying there beside his car in our garage? My dad had raised me himself, ever since my mother died when I was only four. We were more like —"

He stopped a moment. Graham looked away while the boy composed himself.

"And then, on top of that, I got this — this revelation. I'll tell you about it in a minute — I'm just trying to get the sequence straight. I didn't have enough to make sure of a conviction, but I thought I had enough to go to the police about it. I'm not so sure of that now. But that's actually where I was going when the auto accident happened. I was lost in what I was going to tell them, and perhaps I was driving too fast. But I'm not the kind of fellow who would ordinarily hit and

run — you must believe that. It just — it was like a reflex. I suddenly came to, and saw this little kid lying there in the street — I'd felt a kind of bump and I heard her scream — and the next thing I knew, I was blocks away.

"I never lost my head like that before in all my life. But I — it was the second time in a week I'd seen someone lying dead right in front of me — it was like finding dad all over again. I just went home. I didn't even try to have the headlight replaced. They found me the next day without any trouble at all."

"I can understand," Graham said. "And I can see how you couldn't explain without bringing in all the rest of this. But now, if you've really got some information about a murder that someone has committed, why haven't you gone to the Warden with it, and had him notify the authorities, as you yourself were intending to do?"

Ellerby laughed with a note of bitterness.

"Don't you know the answer to that one, Mr. Graham? This piece I wrote was a sort of trial balloon. Not that I expected you'd take it to Mr. Vail; but I wanted to see if you — if anyone — would take me seriously. You say the Warden merely pooh-poohed it. That was because he was talking to you, a distinguished author who is good enough to give an evening a week to teaching convicts how to write."

The young man rose and started to pace the floor. He seemed to be speaking to himself as much as to his teacher.

"Oh, I know Mr. Vail has a national reputation for his progressiveness — I know what a change he has made in conditions here. But what do you think his reaction would have been if I had asked for an interview and told him all I know and all I suspect? Remember, I haven't got everything yet, not by a long shot. Those earlier attempts, for example — I'd never be able to prove them; they're just deductions. It would take a lot of investigating before an arrest could be made. And meanwhile, what would be my position in the eyes of anyone in authority? Either I'm a convicted felon trying to get himself a trip out of prison to testify before the Grand Jury — or I'm a lunatic. I don't want to be sent to the nut-house, Mr. Graham.

"You see, the person I'm thinking about is eminently respectable. He has no police record, as I have now. Nobody would dream of suspecting him of anything.

"In fact, he's my uncle, Frederick Ellerby. I am absolutely sure my father didn't die of heart disease. I am absolutely sure his brother killed him. But it's got to be proved."

There was a long silence. Then Graham said: "I suppose you have more to go on than just conjecture?"

"Plenty more. But even there I'm in a spot. It happens that I dislike my uncle — we have never got on, and for a year at least before dad died he hadn't even spoken to me or come to

our house when I was there. We made up at the funeral, but who'd believe that? What I need — what I need desperately — is somebody who will believe me, and who will at least follow up the leads I have. Then, if they work out as I'm sure they will, the whole thing can be put in the hands of the police. But if *I* should go now to the Warden or to any other authority, I should simply be disregarded — or even put away — and the whole matter would be disposed of forever. A cold-blooded murderer would go unpunished."

"You are afraid that the trail would be too cold if you waited until you are free?"

"That and something else. My uncle is a diabetic. He keeps alive with insulin. In fact, that's one of the first things that made me realize the truth. I'll explain that later. But he's not going to live so very much longer. And I don't want him to die in the odor of sanctity, a murderer who has never even been accused, while I sit here, helpless to accuse him."

"Then what *do* you want done?"

"I want to be able, so to speak, to act as a detective while I'm still a prisoner. I want to give all the facts, all the clues to somebody who is free and will follow them out for me, to the point where the authorities can be brought into it."

"And whom do you have in mind for that?"

"You, Mr. Graham."

"I see."

A voice interrupted them. "Sorry, Mr. Graham," said the guard, "but I have orders to take this man back to his cell block now."

"I'll think it over, Ellerby," said Graham. "I'll make up my mind and tell you my decision at the next class."

In the end Ellerby had to agree that Graham could do nothing except with the Warden's knowledge and consent — "Probably the only Warden in the United States," Graham pointed out, "to whom a prisoner can talk so frankly."

Now they were all meeting in Vail's office, so that Ellerby might tell the reasons he suspected — or accused — his uncle, Frederick Ellerby, of having killed his brother, Duncan Ellerby.

"When I got home that evening with my friend, Sam Turner," Wade Ellerby began, his voice shaking a little, "there were no lights in the house and I thought dad was out. That was unusual, though — he was nearly always there for us to have dinner together."

"Wait a minute, Wade," said the Warden. "Give us the picture first. You and your father lived alone?"

"Ever since my mother died when I was a kid, dad brought me up. He retired five years ago — he'd made a lot of money and he said he wanted some years free while he was young enough to enjoy them." There was a pause, then Wade went on. "We had a woman who came every day to clean and do things around the house, but she left after she washed up from dad's lunch — and mine if I was there —

and didn't come again till the next morning to make our breakfast. Dad enjoyed puttering around the kitchen, and he was a swell cook.

"Another thing he liked to do was tinker with his car — he said an engineer ought to be able to keep one automobile in order; so when Sam and I couldn't find him in the house I went to the garage, through the kitchen door. The garage was dark too, but I switched on the light. And there he was — face down on the floor, and reeking of gasoline. He'd been cleaning his engine, and apparently when he fell he upset the bucket of gasoline he'd been working with, and it had spilled all over him. It's a mercy I didn't strike a match instead of turning on the light.

"Well, you can imagine how it hit me. I yelled to Sam to phone for the doctor right away, and I lifted him and tried to see what was wrong. I knew he must be dead, but I kept trying to feel his heart and his pulse. I was — I was pretty upset, of course. Sam joined me and said the doctor would be there in a few minutes — he was only a block away — and he did come immediately after. He examined dad and said he'd died of heart failure."

"How had you happened to bring your friend home with you?" asked Graham.

"There was no particular reason. I had a psychology class that afternoon, and as I was going down the campus after it on my way home, I met Sam and we stopped to talk. He's a good friend of mine — at least, he was; I haven't seen him since I was sent here. He was at loose ends, so I invited him to come along."

"Well," said the Warden, "when did you begin to think there was something wrong about the way your father died?"

"Not till after the funeral. Something happened then that struck me as queer, and then I began to remember a lot of little things that I'd forgotten.

"In the first place, Uncle Fred came to the funeral, of course, and he came up to me and said he wanted bygones to be bygones. He said it had hurt dad that we'd never got along — there wasn't any particular reason; he just never seemed to like me, and gradually we'd got so we avoided each other's company. I was willing to make up, and we shook hands. Then he said something funny. He said: 'You know, I keep blaming myself for Duncan's death. I might have been there in time to help him. You found him about six o'clock, and the doctor said he'd been dead about two hours. And just about four I was driving right past your house, meaning to drop in and see him. But I saw you going in, so I just drove on.' "

"He saw you going in the house?" said Vail. "What does that mean?"

"That's just it, sir. I wasn't there; he couldn't have seen me. I was at the university; my psychology class was at four."

"Could he have seen someone else and thought it was you?"

"Who could it have been? There was no evidence anyone else had been there, and the front door was always kept locked."

"But what possible reason, if, as you think, he had something to do with your father's death, would he have had for destroying his own alibi by telling you voluntarily that he was at the house at the same time your father must have died?"

"That's puzzled me too. I thought about it a lot. And then I decided it was a subtle way to establish his innocence. Suppose for some reason somebody — not I — should find out my father's death wasn't natural? Uncle Fred would be eliminated, and I would be the one suspected. For he could say: 'Look, if I had anything to do with it, would I have gone to Wade and told him I was there at that very time?' And if he stuck to saying he had seen me entering, the burden of proof would have been on me. He couldn't know where I really was, or that I could prove I was in class at the time."

"Was that the reason you became suspicious of your uncle?" Graham asked.

"Not right away. But I kept thinking about it, and then I recalled something I hadn't paid any attention to before. When I lifted dad up, there in the pool of gas under him was a torn stub of a theater ticket. When I began to wonder about things, I remembered that stub, and it seemed peculiar. Dad was a little hard of hearing — not much — but he didn't like movies because of it, and he seldom went. Besides, this stub was from the News Theater — part of the name was on it — and if there was one thing dad couldn't abide it was newsreels. Neither can I, for that matter. So the next time I saw Uncle Fred I asked him casually how he'd happened to be driving past our place that day, and he said he'd just been to the News Theater and it was so near he thought he'd drop by. Of course I didn't mention anything about the stub."

"Then what?"

"Well, the more I thought, the more things occurred to me. One was dad's tales of two accidents he'd had years ago. Both times Fred was along. Another was a conversation I'd had with dad about a week before he died. He was talking about money, and his will, and things like that. I didn't want to hear any of it, but I couldn't stop him. He said — which I knew — that he'd done quite a lot for his brother from time to time, especially since Uncle Fred's illness started and he'd had practically to quit work — he was a real estate dealer before that. Dad said he'd made a will a few years before, in which he'd left $50,000 to Fred and the rest to me, except for some minor bequests. But he said that for one thing Fred was a bachelor and wasn't likely to outlive him anyway, and for another he didn't care for the way Fred had always disliked me and seemed jealous of me, and now wouldn't even go to see his own brother unless I was out of the way. So he said he was thinking of making

another will, cutting Fred down to $5,000, and putting the difference into a scholarship for engineering students at the university. I told him it was his money and he could do what he liked with it — as far as I was concerned, there would be plenty for me in any case, and I hoped he'd be around for many a long year yet; but I did think, under the circumstances, Uncle Fred being unable to work and all, he ought to leave things the way they were. I never heard any more about it, and apparently he didn't change his will, because when it was probated it was the way he had told me, with his lawyer handling my money for me till I'm twenty-one. But I began then to wonder if he'd told the same thing to Uncle Fred and maybe Uncle Fred had decided to head him off before he lost $45,000."

"It would establish a motive, of course," remarked Graham.

"Exactly. But the thing that finally got me good and certain — no, there were two things."

Ellerby paused a moment. The two men watched him in silence.

"Dr. Cummings, who came when I found dad and who gave the certificate of death from heart failure, was our family doctor. There was an inquest, of course, because dad had died suddenly without medical attendance, but there was no reason for an autopsy, and the verdict was death from natural causes. But when I was going over dad's papers, I found a report of a physical examination he'd taken only about six months before. I'd forgotten about it, but I remembered then we'd heard some kind of radio talk on health, and the speaker had said everybody over fifty ought to have a thorough physical examination once a year. I didn't know till then that dad had evidently taken one; but apparently he'd felt embarrassed about asking for it when he wasn't complaining of any ailments, so instead of going to Cummings he'd gone to some strange doctor downtown. I read the report, and it said the only thing wrong was the beginning of arthritis in his left hip and knee joint. His blood pressure wasn't high and all it said about the heart was 'negative.' So there, six months before, his heart had been perfect, and six months later he was supposed to drop dead of heart disease. It didn't fit.

"And then came the real payoff. I happened to read a book, and suddenly I saw the whole thing as plain as if I'd been there. It was horrible."

"A book?" asked the Warden. "What book?"

"It was a report of the trial of the Nazi doctors who were stationed at the German concentration camps during the war. It told in detail all about their dreadful experiments on human beings, and the means they used in order to kill people off. And it said there was one quick, easy, cheap method — the person would die in from one to five minutes, and the symptoms would be those of a heart attack. It had one disadvantage, though, which was the reason they

used it only on their human experimental animals and never, for instance, on rebellious Storm Troopers they wanted liquidated. It left an odor."

"An odor?"

"An odor of gasoline. What they did was inject gasoline into their victim."

There was a long silence.

"So," Wade continued, his voice strained, "I remembered the way dad had reeked of gas. He fooled around with that car nearly every afternoon. His brother knew it. What would be easier than to wait for the next time he was using gas to clean the engine? It could be spilled all around him, and then naturally he'd smell of it.

"And don't forget — Frederick Ellerby has diabetes. He uses a hypodermic syringe every day to inject insulin into his own veins. He knows just how to use one, and it's a thing that would occur to him where it wouldn't to most other people. It was just his bad luck that I ran across that book too."

"But how do you know," Graham interjected, "that your uncle ever read this book?"

"I don't. That's one of the things I want you to find out for me. I don't believe, now that I've had a year to think about it, that I had enough to justify going to the police at that time. I think I would have at least to prove that my uncle read that book, that he bought a new hypodermic syringe about that time — for of course he would never again use the one that had had gasoline in it — and that he knew about my father's intention to change his will.

"But back then, when I finally put all these surmises together, it struck me all of a heap. I remember slamming the book shut and dashing out to my car — dad's car, the one he was working on when he — died. All I wanted was to get to the nearest police station in a hurry and spill the whole thing. . . . And then came that accident.

"I couldn't bring any of this up at my trial. They would have decided at once that I was just making it up as an excuse for the accident. So when they asked me where I was going in such a hurry, I had no good reason to give — any more than I could explain why I was in such a nervous state that I panicked and drove away. I never even told my lawyer.

"But when I was sent here I couldn't get the thing out of my mind. I've brooded about it till my cellmate told me I was getting ready to blow my top. I think now, Mr. Vail" — he turned to the Warden, embarrassment on his face — "I should have asked to see you long ago and told you the whole business. But, as I said to Mr. Graham last week, I was afraid you'd just think I was nuts. When Mr. Graham started that class in creative writing and I signed up for it, it gave me an idea. When he told us to write about some personal experience, I decided I'd write as if I were my uncle. I did it deliberately, so he'd be startled and question me about it. I never thought he'd go to

you about it, but when he talked to me he made that all clear. You both know the rest."

"What do you think, Mr. Vail?" said Graham.

The Warden reflected a minute before replying.

"It's a strange situation," he said at last. "If a crime's been committed, or if one may have been committed, it's the duty of all of us, of course, to give the authorities everything we know and have them investigate. But I see Ellerby's point; it is unlikely that, especially in a town of that size, the police would be very energetic about pinning a murder charge on a man of Frederick Ellerby's standing, simply on the accusation of his scapegrace nephew who is a convicted felon. If you, Mr. Graham, want to turn amateur detective and try to ferret out the facts, I can see no reason why you shouldn't do so, provided you don't in any way involve this institution or get yourself into any kind of legal jam. For instance, I wouldn't countenance your going to Frederick Ellerby and accusing him yourself, or hinting at it. You could cook up some plausible interest of your own in Duncan Ellerby's death. The real detective — if he isn't just having a brainstorm of some sort — would be this young man here — probably the first time in history that an inmate of a penitentiary has ever acted in that capacity."

"I'd like to do it," said Graham, "and I'll be very careful. It interests me as a writer and as a human being. And, of course, as a citizen also, who like any other citizen wants to see justice done."

"Go ahead, then. I don't know how you'll manage it, but maybe that's one reason I'm not a novelist like you. Just remember the warning I've given you, and see that I'm informed the minute you have anything, pro or con. If it's pro, we'll go right to the police. If it's con, I suppose you realize, Wade, that you'll be in a pretty serious situation yourself? If you've accused your uncle of a murder he didn't commit, and he should find out about it, he could sue you for practically every penny you'll possess when your time here is over."

"I do realize it, sir. I wouldn't take such a chance if I weren't sure. And I'll be eternally grateful, to you and to Mr. Graham both."

"Well, there's one thing, Mr. Vail," Graham laughed, "if this thing backfires, you'll have young Ellerby handy, where he can't avoid the consequences."

The Warden laughed too, and after a moment Wade Ellerby joined in.

"I'm not worried about that," he said. He sobered. "It's not just a puzzle to me, you know," he added. "It's my dad."

"I know that, son. When do you think you can report to me, Mr. Graham?"

"I'll get at it right away. Perhaps I'll have something to tell you within a few days."

Frederick Ellerby was a small, spare man, with no trace of resemblance to

his nephew. As he sat in the comfortable living room of his bachelor apartment, leaning courteously forward to listen to Gordon Graham, his doffed reading glasses dangling between his jointed fingertips, he seemed to the novelist the last person on earth one might suspect of a murder. But then, Graham reflected, real murderers generally did.

"It was good of you to let me come to talk to you," said Graham. "I hope I'm not interrupting you in your work."

"My work, my good fellow?" Ellerby's voice was a trifle high-pitched, his laugh nervous. "My work is nothing — I'm afraid I am more or less of an invalid nowadays, and all I can do is dabble on the edges of what used to be my trade. I used to have my hands full with local real estate, but now if I take around prospects twice a week I'm doing well. Was that what you wanted to see me about?"

"In a sense. You seemed to recognize my name on the phone —"

"Recognize it? I'm honored. I've read all your novels; you're one of my favorite authors. Only through the lending libraries, I'm afraid — I have so little room for books here."

Graham smiled, then got down to business. "I'm looking for a house — a quiet place where I can finish a book I'm working on. An acquaintance told me about your late brother's place, and I went to look at it yesterday. It seems to be just what I'd want for a few months, if it's available."

"Yes, it's quiet enough," said Ellerby thoughtfully. "Right on the county line, with that big park opposite and not another house on the block. It's a nice little place, too — poor Duncan made it very comfortable. But officially I'm not in charge of it. It belongs to my nephew, and he's — he's not in a position to rent it just now."

"You mean he's living in it himself? It seemed to be vacant when I saw it."

"No, he's not there at present." Ellerby flushed. "He's — away. I don't know whether he intends to stay there when he returns or not. I doubt it, though. He might be very glad to rent it to you."

"Aren't you in charge of it in his absence, then? My informant referred me to you when he told me about it."

"I can't imagine who told you that. As a matter of fact, I do have the keys. But I have no authority to rent it."

"Perhaps, though, you could show me through it, and then if I liked it you could give me your nephew's address and I could communicate with him."

Ellerby laughed abruptly.

"I don't know if he'd like to have his address given out. To be frank, Wade and I aren't on the best of terms. But he did, as I said, give me the keys when he left, and I presume he'd have no objection to my taking you through the house. Then if anything came of it, I could communicate with him myself."

"It sounds rather complicated, but I suppose you have good reasons. Well, at least let me see the place inside.

Perhaps it wouldn't suit me at all, and then I shouldn't have to trouble you further. Could we go now?"

"Why not? But would you mind waiting here for me just a few minutes? Unfortunately, I am a sufferer from diabetes, and there is an unpleasant chore I have to perform twice a day to keep me going normally. If you'll just make yourself at home — here's the evening paper, and there are cigarettes in that box — I'll be with you in ten minutes."

"I'm sorry to be such a nuisance. But if you wouldn't object to my saving myself this long trip again —"

"Perfectly all right. You couldn't know."

Ellerby left the room, and Graham heard a door shut after him. He began immediately to scan the shelves of the one bookcase.

As Ellerby had said, there was room for few books. At a glance Graham saw that the one he had in mind was not among them. But that meant nothing. He would hardly have kept a copy about to incriminate himself with; and in any case, he had acknowledged getting his reading matter from the libraries. The public library here had the book — Graham had ascertained that already. It would be easy to find out if it had been taken out on Frederick Ellerby's card.

On their way to Duncan Ellerby's house they passed the News Theater, but neither man commented on it. Graham reflected that it was true that the drive from the theater to the house was a short one.

"Isn't that an awful nuisance," he asked sympathetically, "to have to inject insulin twice every day of your life?"

Ellerby laughed his nervous laugh.

"It's either that or I don't *have* any days of my life. You get used to anything, even to being as unlucky as I am. Well, here we are."

Graham let Frederick Ellerby show him around the house in silence, or with the briefest appropriate comments. But nothing escaped his eyes. When they had toured the two floors, he said: "What about the garage? Is there an entrance from inside?"

"Yes, through the kitchen door." Ellerby hesitated. "I'm ashamed to say it, Mr. Graham, but I still feel a bit squeamish about going in there. That's where they found my poor brother dead, you know. You go and look around if you want. I'll wait for you here."

If he's a murderer, thought Graham as he entered the garage, he's one who *doesn't* want to return to the scene of his crime.

The car was gone — doubtless the police had taken it when Wade Ellerby was arrested — but otherwise, Graham supposed, the garage was just as it had been. He stood for a few minutes visualizing the scene. There the car had stood; there Duncan Ellerby had leaned over his bucket of gasoline; there he had either fallen prone in a sudden heart attack, or — somebody, somebody he wasn't afraid of and who had stood close to him, chatting perhaps of unimportant mat-

ters, had plunged a hypodermic syringe into his body, had seen to it that the gas was thoroughly spilled, and then had calmly gone away and left him to collapse and die. He thought of the quiet little man upstairs — and Graham shuddered.

When he got back, he found Frederick Ellerby leaning back in a chair, apparently half fainting. He rushed over.

"Good fellow," Ellerby whispered. "I'm too weak to get it. Reach in my breast pocket and give me — Thanks."

He unwrapped and swallowed something, leaned back again, and closed his eyes. In a few minutes the color came back to his face and he sat upright.

"Stupid of me," he said in his usual voice. "I must have given myself a bit of an overdose of insulin, hurrying to join you."

"What did you take just now?"

"A piece of sugar. Funny, isn't it? But if I didn't have it always handy, I might die when something like this happens. It doesn't often, fortunately."

"Do you want me to drive?"

"No, I'll be all right now. It's a wonderful system, isn't it? If I ate that sugar under any other conditions, then I might go into a coma and die of *that*. Have you made up your mind about the house?"

"I'd like time to think it over. I'll let you know."

"No hurry. I don't even know if my nephew wants to rent it. Next time I go to — I'll have to write him. He may possibly want to live here, or else to sell it outright when he gets home. But he'll be away quite a while longer, I imagine. Where can I drop you?"

Sam Turner was in his fraternity house when Graham called that evening. Unlike Frederick Ellerby, he did not recognize his visitor's name. "Getting too dated for the younger generation," thought the novelist wryly. But Sam, an open-faced youth with untidy red hair, was polite and amiable.

"So Wade asked you to look me up," he said. "I feel like a heel — I ought to've gone up there to see him before this. But you know how it is — getting ready to graduate this year, same as he would have been, poor devil, and Senior year kind of crowds up on you. But I don't want him to think I've just dropped him because of what happened. Heck, it could have happened to anybody."

"You mean, running over the little girl?"

"That, and losing his head afterwards. What else?"

"I was thinking of his father's death."

"That was sure tough luck. It must have broken Wade all up — I think myself that's why he was in such a state the day the other thing happened. I was with him, you know, when we found the body."

"So Wade said. You'd been in a class together, hadn't you, and then gone to his house?"

"No, I wasn't in any class with him except chem. I think that was a psych class he had, that four o'clock, and I don't take psych. I just met him afterwards on the campus and he asked me back for dinner with him and his dad. I remember, because he had his psych notebook with him, and he said I'd have to beat it early, that the prof had given them a whale of a lot of reading to do."

"What professor was that? I used to know some of the psychology people here."

"Betts, I think — anyway, he was the one Wade used to talk about. Wade and I weren't chums, you know, or anything like that. I saw him mostly in the chem lab. I guess you know, your real friends in college are your fraternity brothers, and he was a barb. Pretty much of a lone wolf in general. I liked him well enough, though, when he wasn't in one of his high-and-mighty moods. But that's the first time he'd asked me to his house. He knew I wanted to meet his father; I was thinking then of going on to an engineering course — I've changed my mind since — and I wanted to talk to Duncan Ellerby about it. Instead, we found the poor old coot flat on his face in a mess of gasoline, dead and gone."

"It must have been a shock."

"It sure was. And it knocked Wade galley-west, of course. I can see him still, pulling the old man up and feeling around in all that soaking wet mess for his heart, while he yelled to me to phone for the doctor."

"Gas all over the floor, eh?"

"Yeah. It's funny how you remember little things at a time like that. It struck me all of a sudden, this is an engineer's garage. Everything so neat, everything in its place, not a rag or a scrap of newspaper or any kind of trash around — not much like our garage at home, you can bet! — and then just this old duck in his shirtsleeves, with his little brush and his bucket of gasoline and —" He shuddered. "Let's talk about something else. You say Wade's taking a class in creative writing with you up there? That doesn't sound much like him. All he was ever interested in before was science. Do *you* write, yourself?"

It was nine o'clock before Graham could decently tear himself away from this loquacious youth. And he had another call to make. The next morning he made several more. Then he was ready to report to the Warden.

"Better have young Ellerby in here with us," Graham said. "I've got a lot to tell, and there's no need to tell it twice."

"Did you find out anything?"

"Plenty."

"Enough to justify making a police matter of it?"

"You judge that when I get through, Mr. Vail."

"All right, I'll send for the boy." The Warden touched a button.

Wade Ellerby was jerky with nervousness when he saw Graham sitting by Vail's desk. He repeated the Warden's own words: "Did you find out

anything? . . . Excuse me, Mr. Vail — I guess this thing's got me down. May I speak?"

"Certainly, Wade, say whatever you like. Mr. Graham tells me he believes he has evidence enough for an arrest. But he wouldn't give me the details till you could hear them too."

Graham looked speculatively for a moment at the tall young man, at his clenched fists and gleaming eyes. Then he said softly:

"I saw your uncle. He took me over your house, garage and all. I saw your friend Sam Turner, and two or three other people at the university. I saw your lawyer, too."

"Gossens? There was nothing he could tell you that isn't in the record. I never saw him till I was arrested on the negligent manslaughter charge."

"I know. But there were things I wanted to check on. As the Warden will tell you, Ellerby, we can't be too careful. We've got to remember that a man is being charged with premeditated murder — a cruel, cold murder with a sordid motive. We must be sure of every detail before we take an irretrievable step."

"And you are sure now? You've got the goods on Uncle Fred? Didn't I tell you how all those little things piled up till there was only one possible answer?" Wade Ellerby's black eyes were blazing.

"I'm sure." Gordon Graham took a deep breath. He stood up and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Wade Ellerby, I declare you under arrest for the murder of your father."

"Graham!" gasped the Warden.

"Citizen's arrest. It's perfectly legal."

"You — you're crazy," stammered Wade Ellerby. His face was white.

"No, I'm not — and neither are you — just too smart for your own good. It was an almost perfect frame-up. But the one person who *couldn't* have killed your father was your uncle."

"Better tell me what's on your mind, Graham," said the Warden quietly.

"I will. How tall was your father, Ellerby?"

"How should I know?" The tone was surly.

"Answer Mr. Graham's question," said Vail sharply.

"Six feet one, the same as me. Why?"

"How much did he weigh?"

"About 180."

"Your uncle is about five feet three, and doesn't weigh more than 110. He couldn't possibly have lifted your father, dead or alive."

"Who says he did?"

"I say that whoever killed him had to lift him. You got a wonderful idea — worthy of the Nazis themselves — out of that book. I don't know whether your uncle ever read it or not, but I'm sure you did. Now, I've been reading up on gasoline injections myself. The effect is always the same. The victim suddenly rears up convulsively, then collapses, falls, and dies in from one to five minutes — usually in three. I had a session with

the head of the biology department — Sanders; you took a course with him. He was interested and we did several experiments with guinea pigs. Every one collapsed in a heap — *supine*, not prone.

"But that wouldn't have suited your book — your father wouldn't have had his bucket of gasoline behind him. He had to spill it all over him, to account for the odor. So he had to be *picked up and laid face downwards* over the spilled gas."

Graham stopped and glanced at Ellerby. The convict's expression was impassive. He seemed to have withdrawn into himself.

"By the way, I inquired whether anyone could walk into a drug store and buy a hypodermic syringe, without a doctor's order. The answer is no. But Professor Sanders told me an interesting thing — it seems that even university students are sometimes light-fingered. He says little things — test tubes, beakers, weights — constantly drift away from the laboratories. 'I don't suppose it's actual stealing,' I said. 'I mean, you'd never miss anything really valuable, like one of these syringes.' 'Even those, once in a while,' he answered. As for disposing of it afterwards, I imagine the bay would be the easiest place."

"This is all guess and hearsay, Graham," said the Warden uneasily.

"The rest isn't. And hearsay can be cumulative. Then we call it circumstantial evidence," Graham replied.

"The next thing is, that while I was with him your uncle suffered an attack of hypoglycalmia. He'd taken an overdose of insulin, and he had to get some sugar into him in a hurry or he'd have gone into a coma. I got it for him from his breast pocket, and he told me he never goes anywhere without its being there. I said it must get messy, even wrapped in paper, in a pocket with all the other things one puts in pockets, and he answered that for that reason nothing else ever gets in that one. The breast pocket is the only one from which a theater ticket stub could have fallen, to be found on the floor."

This time it was the Warden at whom Graham glanced. Vail, he was pleased to see, at last appeared distinctly interested.

"Besides, Sam Turner remarked how unusually clean and free of trash the garage was — he noticed it when you lifted your father after you found him there. He'd have seen that stub if it had been there.

"Another thing: if your father had fallen prone after the injection, nothing could have been dropped *under* his body; therefore, somebody *did* have to lift him and lay him face down — to get that ticket stub under him. But my own guess is there never was a ticket stub — you dreamed that one up, just to make things look worse for your uncle."

"Prove that," said Wade Ellerby.

"O.K. What color was the stub?"

"Yellow or pink or white — how would I remember? It was soaked in gasoline."

"You're guessing. The manager of

the News Theater showed me their tickets. His name is Angus Macfarlane, and he has the tickets printed on bright Scotch-plaid cardboard, as an advertising stunt. Too bad you didn't drop in and get one to make sure, before you added that to your list of clues. But perhaps you didn't think of it till after you were up here. If there's one thing Sam Turner would have noticed on the floor, incidentally, it would have been a piece of cardboard so unusually colored."

Ellerby jumped to his feet.

"You're trying to frame me!" he cried hoarsely. "My uncle murdered dad and now he's bribed you to put the finger on me, so he'll get all dad's money instead of $50,000 of it!"

"Sit down, Ellerby," the Warden ordered, "or I'll call for a guard." The prisoner subsided into his chair.

"Sam Turner was no particular friend of yours," Graham went on grimly. "You picked him up as the first person you met on the campus, to go home with you and help your alibi. He'd never been inside your house before. But I did get one very valuable lead from him. He told me the name of your psychology professor."

"Betts? That's no secret."

"You're a very unlucky young man, Ellerby. I went to see Betts. I wanted to know if he happened to recall your being in his classroom that afternoon. He said he couldn't remember — the class was very large and he didn't take a roll-call except at the beginning of a semester. He recalled you only vaguely anyway, and couldn't even say where you usually sat in class.

"But then suddenly something struck him and he checked back on his records. . . . *There wasn't any class that afternoon, Ellerby!* The professor's wife suddenly had to be taken to the hospital to have a baby, two weeks early, and it was too late for him to provide a substitute — so he phoned the office and the class was called off.

"Ellerby, you left the campus about half-past three — I checked with Turner and you really were in the chemistry laboratory with him earlier that afternoon. You went home, killed your father, and then came back to the university. You were hoping to join the psychology class late, without being observed — if anyone had noticed your absence he would think you had been sitting in the back and had gone out for a few minutes to the men's room or somewhere — but when you got there the room was empty. You presumed the class had been dismissed early, so you wandered around till you found Sam Turner. You gave him a song-and-dance about the heavy homework Betts had just assigned, to fix it in his mind where you'd been since four o'clock. That was a mistake.

"I've wondered why you wanted to frame your uncle, why you didn't just let it go as a natural death. I think I see, now. It was because he told you, at the funeral, about driving by and seeing you entering the house. I don't

suppose you'd recognized him, but you must have had a bad minute, hearing a car pass, while your back was turned, on that lonely street where there were no neighbors to watch your coming and going. You probably looked just in time to see the car turn the corner. So when your uncle revealed, quite innocently, that he had information that could break your alibi, you must have begun to worry, to wonder whether he might not start to suspect you, later on. It took a lot of nerve for you to brazen that out and to turn it against your uncle instead. For, of course, you didn't know till now that your alibi was no good anyway."

"But would that be enough to make anyone take such a risk, Graham?" asked the Warden, as if the man they were discussing were not there. Ellerby was sunk in a stunned silence.

"There may well have been more — that will come out later, unless Ellerby wants to tell us now. Frederick Ellerby was very cagy about saying where his nephew is at present — family pride, of course; and I pretended not to know, out of delicacy; but he did tell me they'd made up at the funeral, and he let slip that he'd been here at least once to see him."

"The records will show that."

"And probably he said something then that showed he was beginning to put two and two together. He might even have found out somehow about the physical examination that Duncan Ellerby took; his brother might have mentioned it to him at the time and he might suddenly have recalled it and been puzzled. That would be when our friend here would get really panicky. Once again he acted by compulsion — just as he did when he tried to escape from the auto accident. He worked up the subtle scheme of writing out the story, which was to attract my fiction-wise eye and so ultimately secure your cooperation in framing his uncle — from the depths of a prison cell!"

"This is all rot!" cried Wade Ellerby angrily, pulling himself together with a visible effort. "Why should I have wanted to kill dad? What was my motive? You've got to have a motive. And Uncle Fred had one. I told you dad was going to change his will and practically cut Fred out of it."

"Sure, that's what you told us. But I told you that I went to see your lawyer. You're quite right; Gossens never heard of you before you hired him for your trial. But lawyers are like doctors — they have a tight-bound association and they know a lot about one another. It wasn't a bit hard for Gossens to find out for me who your father's own long-time attorney was. I went to see him too.

"True, your father told you, as you said, that he was going to change his will. But what he didn't tell you was that he had already discussed it with his attorney. And what he did tell you wasn't that he was going to cut his brother down to $5,000, but that because he felt there was plenty for both of you, and you were young and your

uncle was a semi-invalid and no longer able to do much work, he was going to divide his estate half and half between you."

"That's a lie!"

"The lawyer would have had no reason to lie — he didn't know what you'd told me. And I'd like to say, Ellerby, that that was the one thing that really shocked me in this whole business — shocked me profoundly. Some people commit murder and try to get out of it by blaming others; but there is something extra-callous about attempting to frame a harmless, sick, elderly man like Frederick Ellerby. For a young, healthy man like you, with his life before him and his future bright, to be so greedy for money that half of a large fortune wouldn't be enough for him — for such a person to do his own father to death for the sake of getting nearly all of it — and a father who had been to him what yours was to you . . . He's all yours, Mr. Vail."

"Have you anything to say, Ellerby?" the Warden asked the young man crouched in the chair across the desk from him.

"If I confessed, wouldn't I get off with life?" asked Wade Ellerby. "Not that I acknowledge I did it."

"That would be entirely up to the district attorney of your county," Vail answered. "I'm not an attorney, but my understanding is that willful, premeditated murder, with no extenuating circumstances, calls for the death penalty even if the defendant pleads guilty."

"Damn you, Graham!" screamed Ellerby then. "I ought to have known better than to trust either of you! Don't you idiots realize I had a *right* to do everything I did? Don't you know that the world and everything in it belongs by *right* to people with superior minds? What did my father or my uncle matter beside that?

"Oh, damn you all! First you coop me here for a miserable sniveling Mexican brat not worth the killing. Then you want to destroy outright one of the finest intellects ever born — somebody so far above you that — Oh, why, why have I always played in such rotten luck? You — you're too stupid ever to understand me — but you have brains enough to be afraid of me — the power to persecute me —"

He began to sob.

"It looks as if there were extenuating circumstances after all, Graham," said Warden Vail quietly. "This boy's more likely to end in a ward for the criminally insane than in the gas chamber. I see now why the methods of the Nazi concentration camps appealed to him so strongly. He would have made an ideal Storm Trooper."

He pressed the button twice for a guard.

"The one so like the other . . ."

— SHAKESPEARE

How many detective stories have similar or identical titles? Probably many more than we think . . . Among books of detective short stories, certain titles have become almost traditional. The most popular, by far, is the one which begins with (THE) ADVENTURES OF, *and ends with the detective's (or criminal's) name. The earliest of these, and still the best, is of course A. Conan Doyle's* THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, *and among many others which followed this pattern are Arthur Morrison's* ADVENTURES OF MARTIN HEWITT, *Clifford Ashdown's* THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE, *J. S. Fletcher's* THE ADVENTURES OF ARCHER DAWE, *Scott Campbell's* THE ADVENTURES OF FELIX BOYD, *May Edginton's* THE ADVENTURES OF NAPOLEON PRINCE, *Frank L. Packard's* THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE, *and Dashiell Hammett's* THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE.

The first simple variation of this now-conventional title was to substitute a generic word or phrase for the detective's name — as, for example, in Mrs. George Corbett's ADVENTURES OF A LADY DETECTIVE, *Wetherby Chesney's* THE ADVENTURES OF A SOLICITOR, *and Herbert Cadett's* THE ADVENTURES OF A JOURNALIST. *The next simple variation was to insert an adjective before the key-word — as in Robert Carlton Brown's* THE REMARKABLE ADVENTURES OF CHRISTOPHER POE, *George Barton's* THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF BROMLEY BARNES, *and Nicholas Olde's* THE INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES OF ROWLAND HERN.

When your Editors needed a title for the sequel to THE ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN, *we thought we had found in* THE NEW ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN *a new, if not particularly inspired, variation. But in this type of title there is little that has not been done before. Sir Gilbert Campbell, we learned, called his 1891 book of shorts* NEW DETECTIVE STORIES *— presumably the successor to a previous book called* DETECTIVE STORIES, *although in twenty years of search and research we have not been able to locate such a volume. And, of course, we completely forgot the most famous use of the word "new" in a book of shorts — Robert Louis Stevenson's* NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS.

The next variation was to change the key-word "adventures." Here the field widens, and even after a century of ringing the changes, there are still almost infinite possibilities for ingenuity. But the writers of the past have done very well indeed — witness C. L. Pirkis's THE EXPERIENCES OF LOVEDAY BROOKE, *David Christie Murray's* THE INVESTIGATIONS OF JOHN PYM, *Chief-Inspector Littlechild's* THE REMINISCENCES OF CHIEF-INSPECTOR LITTLECHILD, *Headon Hill's* THE DIVINATIONS OF KALA

PERSAD, *Dick Donovan's* THE RECORDS OF VINCENT TRILL, *B. Fletcher Robinson's* THE CHRONICLES OF ADDINGTON PEACE, *Barry Pain's* THE MEMOIRS OF CONSTANTINE DIX, *Robert Barr's* THE TRIUMPHS OF EUGÈNE VALMONT, *Oswald Crawfurd's* THE REVELATIONS OF INSPECTOR MORGAN, *William MacHarg's and Edwin Balmer's* THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LUTHER TRANT, *Maurice Leblanc's* THE CONFESSIONS OF ARSÈNE LUPIN, *Bennet Copplestone's* THE DIVERSIONS OF DAWSON, *Roy Vickers's* THE EXPLOITS OF FIDELITY DOVE, *Vincent Starrett's* THE CASE-BOOK OF JIMMIE LAVENDER, *and so many others.*

One of the few authors who consistently shunned the classic or traditional key-word was the immortal G. K. Chesterton. All five of the Father Brown books employed the conventional title pattern but the unconventional key-word, although it must be confessed that even that brilliant nonconformist, GKC, found the going rougher after his first three word-choices. Surely THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN, THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN, *and* THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN *offered appealing and refreshing key-words; but* THE SECRET OF FATHER BROWN *and* THE SCANDAL OF FATHER BROWN *were less imaginative, though far from hackneyed.*

All of which brings us to detective stories which have identical titles. In the September 1948 issue of EQMM we gave you a story by W. T. Brannon called "The Perfect Secretary," and now we offer Allan Vaughan Elston's "The Perfect Secretary." We were not even tempted to make a change — it is the perfect title for both stories. But we will discuss similar and identical titles further in the editorial comment preceding the Mary Roberts Rinehart story also in this issue.

THE PERFECT SECRETARY

by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

"NEXT stop, Stamford!" This lusty call came from the brakeman as the train pulled out of Darien. It was 7:49 a.m. Susan Blair, who had boarded at Bridgeport at 7:15, made sure she had plenty of sharpened pencils. She had laid her bag on the seat beside her to save a place for Hugh J. Waterman who, at 7:57, would get on at Stamford.

Waterman, of the Waterman Investment Company, commuted into New York daily. He was a man of habit. Also, he was a human dynamo. It was his habit to dictate from his brief-case, rapid fire, all the way from

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Stamford to 125th Street each morning, and do the same thing on the 5:02 out of New York each afternoon.

Sue had been his secretary for only a few months. She rarely saw him in his New York offices. There she spent most of her time typing what he had dictated on the train. A strenuous job, but the extra pay silenced any objections she might have had.

Her pad and pencils ready, Sue took a minute to powder. Her compact mirror showed a small, alert face, with hazel eyes and a slightly upturned nose. The lipstick job lacked something of balance, and there was a strand of blonde hair loose. A girl had to hurry to catch the 7:15. Deftly Susan corrected these deficiencies.

Waterman himself was a model of neatness; when you worked with him you had to be neat, precise, efficient.

It was now 7:53, and the train crashed through Glenbrook without stopping. It was only half daylight at this hour in December, and people on the Glenbrook platform, as Sue flashed by them, were no more than gray shapes.

Here in the coach the electric lights were still on. Commuters from Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Darien had settled themselves comfortably. The inevitable bridge game was already organized. There was a sprinkling of brokers, merchants, editors. Sue saw young Phil Dodds, toward the front, reading a racing form. Dodds was a junior partner at the Waterman Company, and Sue distrusted him a little because, although a married man, he was always taking the office girls out to lunch.

Directly across the aisle from her sat The Pest. She thought of him as that because every morning he chose a seat across from her, or as near to her as possible. And yet The Pest was not, Sue felt certain, a train wolf. He was a brooding, melancholy sort, and he'd never given her a word or look. He was always completely detached until Mr. Waterman boarded at Stamford. After that he became attentive — not to Sue but to Waterman. Susan Blair was an unusually observant young woman. She liked to classify people. She classified The Pest as a persistent market-tip hound trying to overhear dictation from the investment expert, Hugh J. Waterman.

The conductor came along and punched The Pest's commutation ticket. "Good morning, Mr. Conkling," the conductor said. He knew all the regulars by name and sight. Then he collected a fare directly back of Sue and did not greet the passenger by name.

Sue glanced over her shoulder to see who the stranger was. He was a youngish man she'd never seen before. He wore a discharge button in the lapel of his sports coat, and his trousers were the pinks of an Army officer. The brief glance told Sue three things: that he was nice-looking, intelligent, and completely absorbed, not in herself but in the man directly across the aisle from her — Conkling.

"Stamford!" the brakeman shouted.

Sue turned to the window. With

definite anxiety she prepared to observe the spectacle of Hugh J. Waterman catching a train. Usually it was a scene of some hazard and suspense. And it was the same again this morning. Many commuters were on the Stamford platform, but not Waterman. His sedan wasn't among the cars parked there. . . . The conductor called "All aboard!" . . . And still no Waterman.

The train began moving. Then it happened. A car raced madly up to the station. Waterman's wife, befurred against the dawn chill, was at the wheel. Sue saw her give a goodbye peck at Waterman's cheek, and then Waterman jumped out with his briefcase and sprinted for the train. He was a man in his forties, weighing well over two hundred pounds. Yet he sprinted like a schoolboy, at exactly 7:57 each morning, for the train. This winter morning, in half-light and with ice encrusting the platform, it seemed more of a hazard than ever.

Yet he made it by an eyelash, as usual, by diving for the handrail of the rear vestibule. Sue drew a breath of relief.

He came in puffing, a ruddy, glowing man with two chins but otherwise personable and even handsome. His sartorial appointments were impressive, of a style to make other men seem shabby. He took off his boxy top coat, folded it neatly, and stowed it above on the baggage rack. "Morning, Susan," he greeted briskly, sitting down by her. "On your mark. We've got quite a stack of it today."

He gave her his usual impersonal smile, opened his cumbersome briefcase, and took out a thick assortment of correspondence.

"Answer this," he snapped, "in the affirmative — formally." He began tossing letters to her. "Answer this in the negative — informally. . . . Give these Memphis people the quotations they ask for. . . . Here's one that needs some finesse: My dear Senator: With regard to the Consolidated Cord issues" . . .

For twenty minutes he was like a machine-gun, and Sue's pencil flew: "Here's one from McCoy and Blake, Chicago. Answer it personal to Bill McCoy. Dear Billy: By all means buy Fairfax Airways. And don't forget that meeting on the eighteenth. Hope you've rounded up plenty of proxies —"

Sue gave a slight start. Mr. Waterman, she thought, had made a bobble. Only yesterday he had advised a client to *sell* Fairfax. In fact, Mr. Waterman had completely sold out his own holdings of that stock. Why did he advise a good friend like McCoy to buy?

Sue gave her employer a quick sidewise glance. Beyond him she could see The Pest, Conkling, leaning well into the aisle with an ear cocked. Waterman seemed aware of that attention and slightly resentful of it. It made him nervous, Sue decided, and had caused him to use the wrong verb.

Or had it? He was shrewd. She'd never known him to make a slip

before. Maybe he was misleading Conkling on purpose.

Sue threw a quick glance over her shoulder. The young man back of her, the one in the sports coat and Army pinks, was still fixing a steadfast gaze on Conkling.

Waterman dictated half a dozen more letters. Then, as they pulled out of the 125th Street stop, he closed his brief-case. "That will be all, Susan."

It was her first respite. Sue looked around her. The coach lights, brilliant as they roared downtown through the tunnel, revealed to her a slight blemish in her employer's otherwise perfectly groomed self. It embarrassed her, because she knew she should call it to his attention. Yet she was reluctant. Mr. Waterman was a perfectionist, and he might consider her impertinent. But a sense of duty made her do it. "Mr. Waterman," she whispered, "I hope you won't mind my telling you. When your wife kissed you goodbye at the depot, she left the print of her lips."

"Thanks, Susan." The financier seemed grateful rather than annoyed. With his handkerchief he began wiping at his cheek, the one toward Sue.

The girl laughed. "Let me, please." With her own tiny handkerchief she gave one deft dab at the rouge and wiped it neatly off.

"Grand Central Station!" a trainman called. It was 8:46.

Passing through the gates, Sue saw that the young man in the sports coat kept militantly behind Conkling. Waterman noticed her puzzled look and explained: "His name's Scudder. I hired him to keep an eye on that tip-hound."

Sue was startled. "You mean the man across the aisle? He's not dangerous, is he?"

Waterman, hurrying her toward a taxi, gave a grim smile. "I hope not. But three nights ago some prowler went through the papers in my den desk, at my house in Stamford. It could have been someone looking for confidential information. It might be the man who sits across the aisle and listens in every morning. So I asked Scudder to find out."

Twenty minutes later Sue was in the Waterman Investment offices, busily typing. She did the McCoy letter first and took it in to Waterman's private office. "Is this an error, Mr. Waterman?" She pointed to the verb "buy."

"It's wrong," he said, with an air of surprise which made her conclude the mistake hadn't been intentional. "I meant to say 'sell.' Change it."

"Very well, Mr. Waterman. Also, yesterday you told me to remind you that today is your wedding anniversary."

"So I did." His eyes closed thoughtfully a moment. Then briskly: "Phone Downs-Atlee, Jewelers. Tell them I'll take that emerald brooch I looked at recently. Have them wrap it as a gift and send it right here."

"Yes, Mr. Waterman."

Sue went to her own desk and made the call. It must be nice, she thought, to have a husband that generous. It

was nice for Mr. Waterman, too, to have a wife as devoted as Mrs. Waterman. Only a loving wife, Sue had concluded, would drive her husband to the 7:57 each morning and meet him each evening at the 5:52.

Sue resumed her typing. She took only a half-hour for lunch. It was two o'clock when Waterman called for her to bring him a certain file. "And send Phil Dodds in here."

But Sue failed to find the junior partner. Dodds had gone out to interview customers at ten and hadn't been seen since.

Shortly after four o'clock Sue took a neat batch of letters in for Waterman to sign. She stood by while he signed them. Just as he finished, the young man in the sports coat and Army pinks came in. Waterman said: "Hello, Scudder. This is my secretary, Miss Blair. I'm pretty busy. Make your report to her."

Sue took him out to her desk. Bill Scudder grinned and said: "The report is that Conkling has a cast-iron alibi for the night Mr. Waterman's house was prowled. Someone else did that, not Conkling. That guy's just a harmless tip-hound. His guilt begins and ends with getting an earful of Waterman's dictation on trains."

Sue took it down. Her telephone interrupted and she took up the receiver. A gruff man's voice said: "This is the police chief at Stamford. Connect me with Mr. Waterman."

Partly from habit Sue parried: "He's very busy. Is it important?"

The voice barked back: "Is it important! I'll say it is. His wife's been murdered. Plug me through to Mr. Waterman."

The shock all but petrified Sue. Dizzily she made the connection and heard Waterman's crisp voice, "Waterman speaking." She hung up and faced Bill Scudder, gasping: "It's the police! They say she's been — murdered!"

Scudder stared. "Who?"

"Mrs. Waterman."

In a minute Waterman came out, his face ash-gray. "I'm going home," he said in a tight, broken voice to Sue. He snatched his hat and top coat and rushed to the elevators.

The sudden horror of it left Sue dumb. Then she was aware that Scudder had picked up her receiver, saying crisply: "That call from Stamford! Someone broke the connection. Let me have it again."

To Sue he said: "Might be a trick to get him away from here. Or might tie in with the case I'm working on, the prowl at his house."

The connection was re-established, and Sue heard him say: "Is this the chief at Stamford? . . . I'm Scudder, a private agent employed by Waterman . . . It's on the level, is it? . . . A prowler? . . . Went through his den desk? . . . Thanks, Chief. I'll be right out there."

"What do they know?" Sue quavered.

"His wife," Scudder told her, "delivered Waterman to the depot at seven fifty-seven. A dozen people around the depot saw her drive back

toward home, alone. Her car's in the garage. Today's Thursday, the maid's day off — they keep only one. A neighbor calling on her at four this afternoon found her. Strangled in the den. The den desk had been frisked. She'd been dead seven or eight hours. She must have come back from the depot and surprised the man there."

"It's horrible!" Sue gasped.

"When's the next train?"

"The 5:02 — the one I go home on every day." Mechanically Sue began gathering up her things. Her handbag had been mislaid somewhere. She went into the private office and found it on Mr. Waterman's desk.

"I'm catching that train myself," Scudder said.

They took a taxi to the Grand Central, arriving at 4:55. Waterman, his face haggard, was waiting tensely for the gate to open. "We'd better not disturb him," Sue whispered. "There's nothing we can do."

They stood apart in the crowd, and when the gates opened Mr. Waterman was the first through. They didn't see him again until they were seated on the train. He was three sections ahead of them and across the aisle.

"It was my first case," Scudder said grimly, "and I fell down on it."

"How?" Sue asked listlessly.

"By not tagging the man who prowled the Waterman house three nights ago. If I had, Mrs. Waterman would be alive now."

"You haven't been a detective very long?"

"I'm just a GI fresh out of G-2."

"G-2 means Intelligence, doesn't it?"

He nodded. "I liked that work in the Army; so when I got out I thought I'd take a crack at it on my own."

Sue barely heard him. Her eyes and her thoughts were fixed sympathetically on Mr. Waterman . . . Was the tip-spy Conkling aboard, she wondered? It didn't matter, of course, because he couldn't possibly have been in Stamford right after the train left there this morning. No more than she could herself, or Phil Dodds, or Scudder, or anyone else riding that morning train. The murder, they said, had occurred just after Mrs. Waterman arrived back home from the depot.

Although it was now only 5:30, it was deep dark outside. The train crashed through Larchmont, Mamaroneck, Harrison, Rye.

Was there too much steam on? It seemed so to Sue. Or was it simply this dreadful tension — watching Mr. Waterman ride home to his dead wife — that made the coach seem stifling? Sue asked Scudder to open the window. She could see that Mr. Waterman had already opened the one at his own section.

"Did you know Mrs. Waterman personally?" Scudder asked her.

Sue shook her head. "I saw her twice a day, of course, as she met the trains. Then I saw her once last week when she came to the office to go out to lunch with Mr. Waterman."

Mrs. Waterman had smiled at her —

Sue's thought broke at this point, because of a slight movement by Mr. Waterman three sections ahead. She saw his hand reach through the window and throw something away. The oddness of it was that she seemed to recognize the discarded article. But it couldn't be! It was something of her own and it was in her handbag right now. To prove it, she opened her bag and looked. It wasn't there.

All at once Susan Blair was no longer warm but icy cold. A fact slapped at her like a frozen lash . . . Other facts hit her with jolt after jolt, and they all seemed to fit. Even the fact of Scudder hired to watch Conkling. And that gracious smile from Mrs. Waterman last week at the office! A horsy type, Mrs. Waterman, robust, almost masculine!

The train sped through Port Chester. On toward Stamford, where Mrs. Waterman had always been waiting at 5:52, but where she wouldn't be waiting, in warm life, tonight! And with every click of the rails the facts clung tighter together. In a pattern! That prowl of the Waterman house three nights ago and again this morning. That expensive emerald brooch for an anniversary gift. That bobble in Mr. Waterman's dictation this morning! And that article which should be in her handbag but which instead had just been tossed out by Waterman!

She knew. She was sure of it now. A sense of loyalty made her reticent to tell Scudder. Yet a sense of responsibility urged that she must . . . Scudder, after all, was a detective. A policeman of sorts. His voice spoke to her gently: "You look as though you've just seen a ghost, Miss Blair. Anything I can do?"

"Yes," Sue said impetuously. She looked up at him pleadingly. "You can show me where I'm wrong."

"Wrong about what?"

"Wrong in thinking Mr. Waterman killed his wife."

Scudder stared. "Of course you're wrong," he said bluffly. "She took him to the train this morning. You saw her. I saw her. Fifty other people saw her."

"Day after day for years," Sue agreed, "fifty people have seen her drive him to that train. And they've seen him catch it by the skin of his teeth."

"Well?"

"So it happened again this morning. In the gray winter dawn. I saw it. But ninety-nine per cent of my attention was on Mr. Waterman, to see whether he'd catch the train or not, and only one per cent was fixed on his wife. A woman bundled in furs, and a scarf over her head, and beyond the frosty glass of a car."

A gleam came to Scudder's eyes. "Go on."

"He could have scattered papers out of his den desk himself, three nights ago, and claimed a prowler did it. It would give him an excuse to employ you to watch Conkling. It would center attention on an illusion

that some market-spy had been snooping through his house. You would make one more witness to swear his wife drove him to the train.

"So when she kissed him goodby at the depot," Sue blurted, "it left a print on his face. I wiped it off with my handkerchief. Later he remembered that and he didn't want anything to remind me of it, so that I'd bring it up in evidence. He took the handkerchief, with the red mark on it, from my handbag. And just now he threw it out the window."

"Is that all?" Scudder asked.

"His wife didn't use lipstick. And the woman who drove him to the train does."

Bill Scudder let it sink in. It sank deep. Waterman could have killed his wife at 7:40, before leaving the house. And yet if *another woman* drove him to the 7:57, fifty people would assume that she was his wife!

"Prove to me I'm wrong," Sue begged.

Bill Scudder shook his head grimly. "The proof," he said, "is on the dead woman's lips. If they're unrouged, Waterman killed her. That kiss betrays Waterman if it was any other woman than his wife. It supplies guilt, false alibi, and motive."

He got up. "Where," Sue asked wretchedly, "are you going?"

"To tell Waterman," he said, "that I know who did it."

He went three sections forward to Waterman's seat. Sue saw Waterman turn and look up at him.

She saw fear scar Waterman's eyes, as Scudder dropped into the seat beside him.

The car door opened and a brakeman called lustily, "Next stop, Stamford!"

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly-paced mystery-thrillers are now on sale at your newsstand:

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These volumes, published by THE AMERICAN MERCURY, which also publishes ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, have been carefully chosen and edited by a staff of mystery experts. Fans everywhere acclaim Mercury Mystery books as "tops!"

Only two books of detective short stories published in 1946 qualified, in your Editors' opinion, for Queen's Quorum. One was American, the other Mexican — which is to say, in a larger geographical sense, both were American. The Mexican book was LA OBLIGACION DE ASESINAR (THE COMPULSION TO MURDER), *by Antonio Helú, our esteemed south-of-the-border colleague; this volume contained seven short stories about rogue-detective Máximo Roldán who, you will recall, made his United States debut in print in EQMM. A recent letter from Antonio Helú brought exciting news: the great Mexican mystery writer is playing with the idea of creating a brand-new detective character, and when we tell you the type of character, you will share our avid anticipation — a barber sleuth!*

The other book of detective short stories which proved a major man-hunting event in 1946 was Lillian de la Torre's DR. SAM: JOHNSON, DETECTOR — *another memorable character who was also born in print in these pages. Perhaps the most heart-warming tribute paid to Miss de la Torre came from the 'tec typewiter of Vincent Starrett. In his "lively and learned" column, "Books Alive" (Chicago Sunday Tribune), Mr. Starrett wrote: " . . . only Lillian de la Torre has realized the obvious truth that the Boswell-Johnson team is the only combination in history or fiction that can rival the Holmes-Watson legend. What if Dr. Johnson had turned his learning and penetration to the detection of crime, she asked herself; and what if Boswell had chronicled his exploits?*

"Seduced by this magnificent idea, she seized her 18th century quill and wrote a unique and delightful volume of detective short stories . . . The book is a little miracle of perfection . . . Possibly it is the best book in the classic tradition since THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES."

THE VIOTTI STRADIVARIUS

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

(as narrated by James Boswell, April, 1783)

THE Viotti Stradivarius was detected by ear, a feat Dr. Sam: Johnson with his thickened and unmusical hearing could never have attained to; but so much does mind govern and even supply the deficiency of organs, that by mere ratiocination and knowledge of the world he was able to detect and restore, what the sharpest eye passed unseeing, the great Orloff diamond. The only loser by that night's strange work at Dr. Burney's was his daughter, Miss Fanny, whose little waxen figurine

had to be destroyed beyond recall.

Eagerly I had accepted of that invitation to make one in a musical party of pleasure in St. Martin's Street. Men and manners are my study, and sure nowhere in London might one meet with such men, or such manners, as displayed themselves at the musical conversazioni of London's first musician and our very good friend, Dr. Charles Burney.

Behold me, then, James Boswell of Auchinleck, advocate and philosopher (if I may so stile an observer upon mankind) in my sky-blue sattin, attending, like a pinnace upon a man-o'-war, my stately friend Dr. Sam: Johnson. How well I remember the rugged countenance, the little brown wig, the massive figure, aye, the full-skirted snuff-coloured coat and the waistcoat with the brass buttons. How comfortably we were at home with handsome Dr. Burney.

We sat in his fine withdrawing room, once the study of Sir Isaac Newton. Every candle was alight, every sconce blazed, every prism shook with light. Seated by the fire, moulding a little waxen figurine with nervous fingers, mousy Miss Fanny was attired in violet brocade under tissue. I wondered much at such gaudy attire in the house of plain Dr. Burney.

The company that began to assemble was no great matter. First came the Bettses, father and son, violin-makers of St. Martin's Lane, small men, neat and cheerful, with quick brown eyes and respectful bows all round. Each carried an instrument, the father a violoncello, the boy a violin. The boy bore the flat cases with loving care into the little inner room adjoining.

Now came in Dr. Burney's favorite pupil, Miss Polly Tresilian, a Venus in miniature, a little perfection, with pouting red lips and her own yellow hair drest in the new round stile, set off with a baby's gown of clustering gauze, the colour maiden's blush. She was attended on the one side by her father, the portly rich jeweller of Cheapside, and on the other by his journeyman, young Chinnery, sandy and thin, and with eyes only for Miss Polly. 'Twas a trio known in every drawing-room and pleasure-garden of Mayfair.

But the trio had become a quartet. If Chinnery had eyes only for Polly, Polly had eyes only for the dark graceful young man who entered behind her. He wore his own raven curls clustering about a well-shaped head. His figure, though small, was well-proportioned and graceful, and set off by a quiet suit of gold brocade. His olive features were expressive, amiable, and radiant, and he bent his melting black eyes upon Miss Polly. He carried a violin in its flat case. Tresilian presented him with pride:

"Giovanni Battista Viotti, the wonder of the age! The sweetest fiddler that ever touched string! The favorite pupil of Pugnani, that has transcended the master! Honoured by Queen Marie Antoinette and the Empress Catherine! Yet now he comes to England as a simple fiddler, without

fanfare; and had not my brother the lapidary of Paris sent him to me for a banker, he had been lost to us in the crowd."

Upon this encomium, the famous Italian looked mighty abashed and put about; he bowed low, and looked for a corner to hide in. Dr. Burney made him most cordially welcome, and I would have escorted him to the seat of honour by the fire, had not Miss Fanny drawn him to her on the other side.

"Pray, pray," I cried, "Signor Viotti, let us not delay, but give us a touch of your string!"

Upon this an air of waiting settled upon Dr. Burney and Miss Fanny, and all was unaccountably delayed, so that I was constrained to whisper a question in Miss Fanny's ear.

"You think right," she whispered back, "there is indeed a guest to come, none other than the great Russian, Prince Orloff, lover to the Empress, whose terrible thumb strangled the Czar, as the whisper goes. He is music-mad, and resorts to us much. But perhaps this is he."

A mighty thundering upon the door promised no less. The door swung open, and an absolute giant of a man crowded through. He stood not an inch under seven feet high, a man handsome, well-fleshed, upright, and magnificent. He was superbly drest in the French stile, and adorned as for a court birthday. Besides the blue garter, he had a star of diamonds of prodigious brilliancy, and a shoulder knot of the same lustre and value. A picture of the Empress hung round his neck by a riband, set with diamonds of such brightness and magnitude that when near the light they were too dazzling for the eye, and made the lustres dim.

He made his greetings with an air and address shewy, striking, and assiduously courteous, with now and then a quick darting look that seemed to say, "I hope you observe that I come from a polished court? — I hope you take note that I am no Cossack?" Little Miss Polly positively took her eyes off young Viotti, and gasped, as the newcomer made her his bow, and favoured her with an ogling, half cynical, half amorous, cast of the eye.

She gasped again as she caught a first glimpse of the Prince's entourage: two great Cossacks who made up in the height of their fur hats what they lacked of Prince Orloff's stature. They flanked the door with folded arms and looked at nobody. Clearly they were to be regarded as furniture, most like the horses which waited with the Prince's carriage in the alley below.

Prince Orloff was mighty affable and complaisant. He and Dr. Johnson exchanged most respectful greetings. There was a brief flurry of bows as each ceded the other the place of honour, and then all subsided into silence and stared at the romantick Russian, while he stared back. This impasse was broken when little Miss Polly whispered a wish into Miss Fanny's ear, and she as ambassadress carried it to His Highness.

The little lady wished to see the

miniature of the Empress a little nearer, the monstrous height of the wearer putting it quite out of her view.

The Prince laughed, rather sardonically; yet with ready good humour complied; telling Miss Fanny, *sans ceremonie*, to untie the riband round his neck, and give the picture into the possession of the Fair.

He was very gallant and debonnaire upon the occasion; yet through all the superb magnificence of his display of courtly manners, a little bit of the Cossack, methought, broke out, when he desired to know whether the Fair desired anything else? declaring, with a smiling bow, and rolling, languishing, yet half contemptuous eyes, that, if the Fair would issue her commands, he would be stript entirely! At this Miss Fanny flushed, and hastily passed the miniature into my hands.

There was hardly any looking at the picture of the Empress for the glare of the diamonds. They were crowded into a barbaric setting of pure gold, and pendant at the bottom from a loop of gold hung quite the largest diamond I have ever seen, cut *en pendeloque*, long and lustre-shaped, and something of the colour of a ripe pear. Dr. Sam: Johnson blinked near-sightedly at the thing over my shoulder.

"This is a prodigious gem," said I. "Pray, your highness, has it not a history?"

"A black one," said the Prince carelessly. "'Twas stole from the forehead of a Hindoo idol by a rascally French sailor, and so passed by theft and violence from one scoundrel to another."

"Good lack!" cried little Miss Tresilian, "how if you should meet the three visiting Hindoo nabobs face to face!"

"But naturally I have met them," replied the Russian, showing all his teeth in a grin. "Mrs. Montague had the three Hindoos; Mrs. Vesey had the Russian Prince; naturally to maintain her supremacy, Mrs. Thrale was forced to have the three Hindoos *and* the Russian Prince."

"Oh, good lack," cried Miss Tresilian, pleased, "and what said they to the idol's ornament?"

"Never a word said they, but eyed it without blinking. 'Twas at their eye-level," added the Russian giant.

"You must keep a good look-out," said I, "against Lascars and dark-avised men."

"Nay," roared the Russian giant, "let *them* look out for *me*. 'Tis mine, and so I will maintain, for I paid 200,000 rubles for it."

"So much?" breathed old Betts, and had the gems from my hand. He carried the thing under the mantelpiece lustres, and examined it with his glass to his eye, murmuring the while: "Nay, Arthur, I must get this by heart, I must fail of no detail, an account of this will be meat and drink to your uncle the Dutch merchant!"

Over his shoulder young Arthur regarded the precious thing with lack-lustre eye. "Of what use is it?" he scoffed. "Can a man eat it? Will it

cure the evil or the pthisick? No, Father, the famed Stradivarius of Signor Viotti is the treasure for my money."

"You say true," replied old Betts instanter, "and if I thought otherwise I had myself turned Dutch merchant and no fiddle-maker. Away, gross pelf!"

He yielded the blazing circlet carefully into the hand of Miss Tresilian.

"Welcome, gross pelf," murmured she with a rueful smile, and looked into Viotti's eyes, "for the tenth, aye the twentieth part of this gem would buy a life-time of happiness for two hearts."

The Italian pressed her hand, and together they gazed upon the famous Empress.

Chinnery bit his lip.

"Nay, then, let others see," he cried bitterly. He took the miniature. With professional attention he must needs examine the great stone through his lapidary glass, holding it in the glow of the mantelpiece sconces and turning it this way and that. Prince Orloff seized the occasion to murmur a word in Miss Tresilian's ear; clearly a Cossack compliment, for she mantled and shrank, and Viotti straightened his shoulders to glare at his highborn vis-à-vis.

Then Miss Fanny took the ornament again carefully in hand, and passed the riband over the bent head of the Russian giant. He settled the miniature in its frame of diamonds complacently against his massive chest.

"But come," I cried, "let us delay no longer to look upon the Prince of fiddles, the famed Stradivari of Viotti."

Viotti bowed, and fetched it from the inner room where our effects lay.

"You must know," said he, opening the clasps and revealing in the silk-lined flat case a violin-shape swathed in silk, "that Antonio Stradivari lived and worked at Cremona more than fifty years, and made many superb violins; but mine is the greatest of them all." He loosed it from its silk, and gave it into the eager hands of young Betts. All clustered about to view this second wonder.

"'Tis a giant among fiddles!" cried young Betts—"even as [bowing] Viotti is a giant among fiddlers."

"What minuscule holes," said I, examining the graceful curved incisions, like an S, in the face of the instrument, "how does one get inside?"

"Minuscule!" cried young Betts, "they are quite the largest I have ever beheld."

"That is so," said Viotti, "it is to this grandeur of dimension that I attribute my instrument's grandeur of tone. Old Stradivari never quite repeated it; makers think that to make so large an incision, the grain must be right, or the face will break."

"I am of that mind," said old Betts; "and as to getting inside, one must take the instrument apart; failing which, he may use my new-invented instrument, which I use for adjusting the sound-post—" he displayed a

specimen from his pocket — "you see it is curved *so*, and articulated *so*, and it goes inside with ease, *so*." With his neat little left hand, he manipulated the ingenious implement like a conjurer.

"Remarkable," cried Viotti, "I must have one."

"Pray," said Betts, "accept of this one."

"Sir," said Viotti, pocketing it, "I am your debtor."

"Then you shall repay me," said old Betts, "with a tune."

"At your service, sir. But I see tea approaching —" the fiddler began to case his instrument with loving care — "I shall fiddle for the company after our regale."

He bore the precious thing to the inner room as one carries a child to the nursery; and we all addressed ourselves to the tea-table.

Viotti drank his tea sitting at Miss Tresilian's feet. I thought the lady's eyes roved a bit as long as they were tête-à-tête; but when Mr. Chinnery came from the withdrawing closet and moved to her side, where he sat glowering and taking nothing, then who so gay, so mantling, so laughing and pert as pretty Miss Tresilian between her two swains? And who, when tea was over, pressed for a tune so irresistibly as she?

"I am all yours, ma'am," said the handsome fiddler, and fetched his violin.

Miss Tresilian settled her draperies at the harpsichord, Viotti brought down his bow, and I heard the storied Stradivari give forth a note as dismal and dull as ever blind crowder scraped out of his kit.

Viotti turned white, and set down the fiddle.

"This is not my violin," said he.

Dr. Johnson, to whom all musical notes, when not inaudible, are painful, picked up the instrument.

"'Tis no other," he said positively.

"I know the voice of my violin as a mother knows the cry of her child," cried Viotti passionately, "and this is not my violin. 'Tis a clever copy, by eye alone you shall not tell them apart — but be assured, 'tis only a copy."

He put it angrily from him. I took the rejected instrument into my hands, I weighed it, I shook it against my ear. All seemed in order. I brought it to the light and peered into the f-hole.

"See, see," I cried, "the label! The Cremona label!"

Antonius Stradiuarius Cremonensis
Faciebat Anno 1709

"I see it," said Viotti bitterly. "He who can forge a violin can forge a label."

The Russian Prince, condescending to interest himself in the fate of the Viotti Stradivarius, bent down to peer in his turn. His miniature, dangling, caught in Viotti's raven curls, and as he straightened again the pendant stone parted from the soft gold loop with a jerk. 'Twas Viotti who first felt what had happened; he brought the stone from his locks with

an exploring hand, and extended it to its owner, with a bow.

His Highness's answering bow was all civilized— but as his eye lit upon the stone his roar of anger was all Cossack. What he held was a prism of white glass. Dr. Burney turned pale; Dr. Johnson murmured in my ear: "Here is an artist at substitution!" and His Highness began to hiss through his teeth in Russian. Consternation struck the company; and futile though the gesture was, by common consent we turned to and scoured the rooms, inner and outer. The Orloff diamond was not to be found.

"This is a matter for Bow Street!" cried Dr. Johnson.

"This is a matter for *me*," replied His Highness, shewing his teeth and speaking too softly. "I am my own justice. I shall expose this thief, and my Cossacks will kill him for me."

Miss Tresilian rose in horror.

"Let no one move," said Prince Orloff, still between his teeth. "We will sit here, till my diamond is restored, and —" he bowed to Viotti — "we make common cause, Signor — till the Stradivarius is restored as well."

Never will I forget the next three hours. At first Mr. Tresilian tried to take the reasonable view, and was mighty prosy in respect to the hazard of jewel-thieves in his shop. But Prince Orloff grinned upon him without mirth until his voice dried to a trickle, and died away. Miss Fanny would have worked her beeswax figure, but 'twas not to be found, so she worked her fingers instead.

Upon this Dr. Johnson was seized with one of his strange rolling fits, and went about the room touching everything against the evil chance. Oscillating his head and ejaculating "Too, too, too," with tongue and teeth, he perambulated the rooms, both inner and outer. Often have I seen him thus in Fleet Street, touching the poles of the carriage in his absent fit. Tonight 'twas his humour to touch the under side of every thing, even the window-sills, in and out; and to tell the prisms of the lustres, every one. The self-imposed task was scrupulously performed before he returned to his seat by the fire, where he sat rolling and muttering in abstraction. Once Viotti opened the instrument-cases in the ante-room, but fruitlessly, for he returned to his place again in dejection. And again silence took us, and Prince Orloff's demoniack eye.

'Twas Miss Polly who finally broke the spell. She went off in hystericks.

"Pray, pray, your highness," said Miss Fanny in a small voice, "be pleased to take our parole, this is most unfitting for a young and tender female. Pray let the ladies depart."

"Why, ma'am," replied Prince Orloff courteously, "you may depart when you will — but" — the Cossack shewed his teeth — "you must leave your garments behind!"

Miss Tresilian wrung her hands, but Miss Fanny shewed better resolution.

"Be it so. My woman shall bring

us others, and the ante-room shall serve for tiring-room."

So it was done. Though the discarded garments were stringently searched as to every seam, nothing of note was found except indeed that Miss Tresilian was revealed to be wearing the new female breeches richly laced, a practise which I shall recommend to my dear wife.

Miss Tresilian returned to us tripping in the hem of a gown of Miss Fanny's. Prince Orloff himself lunged his fingers into her soft hair, seemingly undecided whether as a caress or a punishment, and finding nothing there, not even a pad of wool, pronounced her ready to depart. Now a new question arose: how was an unprotected lady to make her way back to the City unattended?

"Let me be searched, and I will see her home," cried Chinnery. "'Tis my daugher," put in Tresilian. Orloff was sick of the sight of them. He spoke in Russian to his entourage, and while one stood on guard the other laid hands upon Chinnery and bore him off to be searched. The ante-room was the scene of the proceedings, and Prince Orloff stood by to see that no seam, no curl of the wig was missed. Chinnery returned to Miss Tresilian very white, and fat old Tresilian took his place.

"At this rate I will go too," cried Viotti, and passed into the ante-room.

"Come," cried Chinnery, and without waiting for his rival swept his master and Miss Polly down the stair and away.

Viotti was seething upon his return to the withdrawing room, and when he saw the girl was gone his temper went higher. He rushed to the door. The Cossack without so much as by your leave wrenched the violin-case from his hand, had it open in a trice, and with one hand ripped out the silken lining while with the other he roughly shook aloft the substituted violin.

"Nay, keep it," shouted Viotti in a passion, and rushed without it down the stair. Fussy little Betts retrieved the lining from the floor, and restored the whole neatly to the case, shaking his head over the violin the while. Orloff eyed him malevolently.

"Let you begone," he shouted suddenly. "Search him, and away with him! — You, too," he added, scowling wolfishly upon the trembling boy.

They were searched and gone, and all the instruments with them, and still we sat about the dying fire, Dr. Johnson swaying and muttering, Miss Fanny working her fingers for want of her beeswax, Dr. Burney in gloomy reverie, Prince Orloff pacing the room in agitation, the Cossacks immovable with folded arms.

Suddenly Prince Orloff came and touched Dr. Johnson confidentially on the knee.

"For what do we wait?" he asked softly. "For a piece of dead stone? 'Twas mine, 'tis gone. It is the will of God. Let us go home."

"Now I see, Prince," said Dr. Johnson, "that you are a philosopher."

"It is the will of God," said the philosopher. "Let us go home."

Next morning betimes I waited upon Dr. Johnson; but early though I was, one was before me. 'Twas Dr. Burney's footman, his eyes starting from his face. He stood in the front room twisting his hands before him. Dr. Johnson signed me to listen.

"Which when I heerd this housebreaker a-prying and a-scratching at the entry-way, sir," said the footman earnestly, "I ons with my night-gown, and ups with my blunderbuss, and lets fly, Sir."

"What like was the miscreant?" enquired Dr. Johnson.

"Nay, Sir, 'twas that dark, I never looked at 'un, but let off my piece without waiting."

"Was he not a black man?" I asked eagerly.

The man shrugged.

"All cats is black in the dark, as they say, Sir."

"What wore he? A banjan? A turban, belike?"

"Nay, Sir, I cannot say, he was muffled to the brow in something, and when the blunderbuss went off he legged it mighty spry."

"Did you not hit him, then?"

"Never a whit, for I fired in the air."

"'Tis a great pity," said Dr. Johnson thoughtfully, "for 'tis clear that the diamond is hid in that room, and the thief was forced to return for it in dead of night. Now had you scanned him, or marked him with a pellet, you might have known him again."

"Yes, Sir," said the man miserably, "I conceived it was my dooty, Sir."

"Very good, William," said Dr. Johnson kindly, "always do your duty, my man. Well, we must see what we can do. Pray, William, desire your master from me, to make the withdrawing room secure, and admit nobody, until I shall direct him further. Say to him, that as soon as Boswell and I have broken our fast, we shall be with him straight, and shall concert further measures."

Making a leg, the man withdrew, and soon the floating aroma of good India tea heralded Francis the manservant with our breakfast.

"Surely all is now clear," I cried in excitement, "I see it all. This olive-skinned, black-browed young man who calls himself Viotti has hypothecated Prince Orloff's diamond, and but for the vigilance of the good William he had already carried it in triumph to the hands of his masters the Hindoo princes."

Johnson swallowed a swig of tea.

"How do you make that good?" enquired he mildly.

"Why, thus, sir. Who is Viotti?"

"Why, Sir, Burney will tell you, Europe's rising young violinist, the favorite pupil of Pugnani, the fiddler who has played his way into every heart in Geneva, Dresden, Berlin, Warsaw, St. Petersburg, and Paris . . . and into one heart in London."

"Are you sure Viotti is in London?"

"My eyes tell me so."

"You judge over-hastily," I cried, triumphing to have so caught out my philosophical friend. "Who has seen Viotti? Have you? Has Burney? Who knows that this black-browed young man is in very truth Viotti, and not an impostor? Your eyes tell you, here is a young man. Mr. Tresilian tells you, this is the world's greatest violinist. Who tells *him* so? The man himself. But a man may lie. Letters from Paris. But letters may be forged."

"Yet what folly," suggested my learned friend mildly, mopping tea from the ridges of his waistcoat, "what folly to attempt the one personation a man cannot make good. 'Tis as if I were to strive to pass myself off as Johnson the equestrian. How long can I sustain the character? I must be detected the moment the company challenges me to mount and give an exhibition of my skill."

"Aye, sir," I exclaimed in excitement, "and so must he be the moment he puts bow to violin — unless he has the wit to extricate himself by pretending the sad lumpish wails he produces proceed from a violin bewitched, a changeling violin, a forgery. As indeed the instrument he carries must be a forgery, for how is a masquerader to come by a genuine Vremona? Nay, what need has he of a true Stradivari, who cannot play upon it like Viotti, be the instrument never so great? No, Sir, depend upon it, we have here to do with an impostor, come hither with no other object than to steal the great Orloff diamond from the Prince."

JOHNSON: "Surely 'tis a needless elaboration. A man may steal a diamond without giving himself out to be the world's greatest performer upon the violin, the haut-boy or the Jew's-harp."

BOSWELL: "How? How is one to take a diamond from a warrior seven feet high, unless by lulling him into security? For which, his easiness at the home of Dr. Burney is pitched upon. His partiality for music is known."

JOHNSON: "Well, Sir, say on. How did the pseudo-Viotti make off with the diamond after passing under the hands of the Cossacks?"

BOSWELL: "Nor did he so. He dared not attempt it. Hence his fit of passion in departing. He must depend upon his entrée at Burney's to carry it off subsequently from its hiding-place within the room."

"Why, Bozzy, you must consider," said my friend, peering into the empty tea-pot, "that our thief, whoever he be, was fain to gain entrée at dead of night, at risk of a blast from a blunderbuss. Is this your conception of the entrée at Dr. Burney's?"

"Perhaps passion warped his judgment. Or, it may be, the princely Hindoos his masters pressed him to the attempt."

"Pray, Bozzy," said my friend with asperity, setting down his cup with finality, "let us have no more of this romantick tale of the princely Hindoos, who in my belief know no more of the matter than the babe unborn. The diamond is to seek in Dr. Bur-

ney's withdrawing room, and the thief is to seek among those who were in it, so let's be up and doing, and leave the Hindoos to Mrs. Macaulay."

So saying, he clapped his old cocked hat on his little brown scratch-wig and set forth. I followed suit, and we set out for St. Martin's Street.

Passing, as so often before, with admiration under Temple Bar, whom should we meet but the very man, him who called himself Viotti.

"Well-met, Dr. Johnson!" cried the volatile foreigner, "well-met indeed, for I am come forth to seek you. They give you a name, sir, for a detector of villainies, and I who have suffered one indeed, beg that you will put forth your endeavour to restore my priceless Stradivari and detect him who has made away with it."

I looked with amaze upon this impudence, but Dr. Johnson received the young man with unruffled complaisance.

"Pray, Sir, walk along with us, and let us take counsel together."

I fell back a pace, the better to have the suspected young man under my eye, the while my ear was alert to every word my astute friend might let drop.

"Well, Sir," began Dr. Johnson, "where, then, do you lodge?"

"At Joseph Hill's, Sir, at the sign of the Harp and Flute, in the Haymarket."

"Oho, the violin maker! Here's a man who knows a good fiddle when he sees it! Pray, sir, how know you that 'twas your own fiddle you brought away from thence last night?"

"I played upon it, sir, and it was never sweeter. I played for a space of ten minutes together, and then I wrapped it in silk, and laid it in the case, and so brought it away to Dr. Burney's. No, Sir, the exchange was made under my nose as it lay in the inner room, and priceless instrument somehow spirited away from thence."

"No such thing, Sir," replied Dr. Johnson. "Did one of those who were searched to the skin by the Prince's Cossacks succeed in smuggling thence so large a thing as your Stradivari? Disguised, perhaps, as a walking-stick?"

"I give you back your question," replied Viotti doggedly. "My Stradivari cannot still remain at Dr. Burney's. Those rooms were stringently searched for a stone no larger than a nutmeg. Did we pass unseeing so large a thing as a fiddle? Disguised, perhaps, as a hearth-brush?"

I jerked my head at this impudence, and muttered "Tschah" between my teeth. Dr. Johnson cast me a lowering look, and as we approached St. Martin's Lane he continued.

"Let us approach the matter by logic. Who will steal a violin? He who can play upon it. Who will substitute a forged fiddle? He who can make one. 'Tis plain: if the thief be not your landlord Hill —"

"Sir, sir," I ejaculated, "the most honoured violin-maker in London —"

"Then it can only be . . ."

"Hark!" cried Viotti, oblivious,

and stood quite transfixed. "Hark!"

Dr. Johnson frowned, and seemed to strain his dull hearing. I heard it plainly — the tones of a violin, of particular sweetness, and played with a practised hand. Viotti's eyes seemed to start from his head.

"'Tis no other," he cried in a strangled voice, "I cannot be mistaken, 'tis my own Stradivari, and played by the hand of a master!"

I looked at the house whence the strains floated. The narrow door was ajar. Above it hung a gilded fiddle, and the brass plate bore the legend:

"JOHN BETTS, Violin-maker."

Viotti rushed through the door instanter, and we were constrained to follow. Like the lute of Orpheus, the mellifluous voice of the fiddle pulled us irresistably into the violin-maker's workroom.

'Twas Arthur Betts who played. He held the shining fiddle like a lover, and the silver notes cascaded under his bow. Seated at his worktable in a litter of pegs and patterns, his father beamed upon him and kept time with his famous articulated instrument. Our tumultuous entry but redoubled his smile. He met the rush of the choleric violinist with a rush as swift, and enveloped him in an embrace.

"Signor Viotti," exclaimed he, "I give you joy! Your Stradivari is restored to you good as new. You have been made the victim of an infamous trick, Sir, but by my skill I have made all right."

Arthur Betts, his fiddling broken off, extended the violin.

"Do you set bow to it, Sir," he exclaimed, "and your heart will be at rest. Oh, Sir, 'tis the sweetest, the most responsive . . ."

Viotti, in an agony of impatience, yet forbore to snatch the precious instrument. Gently he accepted it from the boy's hand, gently he set bow to it and drew it across the strings, and it answered him like honey from the comb. He began to play. If Arthur Betts had drawn sweetness from the famous instrument, now it was brought alive. It wept, it danced, it laughed, it sang. Never have I heard such fiddling. Even Dr. Sam: Johnson uncreased his brow. He looked at my rapt countenance.

"Is this Viotti?" he murmured in my ear.

"None other," I replied; and even as the great violinist dropped his bow and caressed the violin in the cup of his hand, I realized that all my conjecture was vain, and the answer to both our riddles was still to seek.

"Pray, Sir," demanded Dr. Johnson of Betts, "how have you wrought this miracle?"

"You must know, Sir," replied the violin-maker, "that I was no more satisfied than yourself that a substitution had been effected. I desired to examine into the matter more closely, and to that end, as you know, Sir, I carried the instrument away with me. This morning I set it on my workbench and opened it — and lo, the thing was made clear. Some enemy — jealous, as it might be, or desiring to

damage the master's reputation, had with great subtlety introduced against the sound-post — a quantity of beeswax!"

He handed the substance in question to Dr. Johnson, a hardening wad of the stuff of about the bigness of a nut of Brazil. I peered over Dr. Johnson's shoulder as he turned it in his big shapely fingers. One side bore the grain mark of the sound-post; on the other, clearly impressed, was the mark of a finger.

"Beeswax!" cried Viotti. "Small wonder the sound was deadened!"

"How so?" enquired I. A new realm was opening to me.

"I will shew you, Sir," said Betts. From his work-bench he took the two halves of another instrument. "The sound, d'ye see, Sir, is made by drawing the bow over the string. But the sound is thin, and of no account, till it be resounded within the belly of the instrument. Now much depends on this strip of wood which lies in the belly, being made fast there — 'tis by name the bass bar; and much depends on this peg which joins top and bottom. This peg we call the soundpost, and 'tis most particularly not to be meddled with. 'Twas just here, that our Vandal had loaded the Viotti Stradivarius with this pad of wax. How determined an enemy is he who takes such pains. Pray, Signor Viotti, have you ever an enemy in England?"

"None that I know. Yet stay, an enemy I have, so much is certain, for last night in my homeward way I was followed, and I feared a knife in the ribs."

"More like a horse-pistol, with a 'Stand and deliver.' Yet you came off unscathed after all."

"I shewed him a clean pair of heels; I can run with the best. Yet how have I earned such hatred? Who can hate me so?"

"Who," said Dr. Johnson with a laugh, "but another violinist?"

"Or," said Arthur Betts quickly, "a rival defeated in love?"

Johnson was staring at the lozenge of wax through the violin-maker's glass.

"I think," he said in an absent voice, "I think we may soon find out."

"How, Sir?" demanded Viotti eagerly. "I would give much to know the scoundrel."

"There is a way," said Johnson, "or my observation is much at fault. Let us gather tonight once more, in the withdrawing room of Dr. Burney. I'll engage him to receive us. 'Tis there I'll expose Signor Viotti's enemy; aye, and perhaps restore the diamond of Prince Orloff."

The musical trio strove to learn more, but not another word would Dr. Johnson say. They perforce consented to the rendezvous. We left Viotti descanting upon the art of violin-playing, and Arthur Betts hanging entranced upon his every motion.

"Pray, Sir," I enquired as we made the best of our way to Dr. Burney's,

"how do you propose to lay your hand upon him who tampered with yonder violin?"

JOHNSON: "Look upon this wax. See the print of a finger upon it. I will engage, with luck, to fit this print to the finger that made it."

BOSWELL: "Nay, how? Remember the thumb-print at Stratford, where you said that some other means than gross measurement must be found to fit a finger to its print."

JOHNSON: "I have found the means. I will put my finger — nay, his own finger —"

BOSWELL: "Or *her* finger."

JOHNSON: "Or *her* own finger — 'tis indeed a slim one — on the miscreant."

BOSWELL: "I muse who it may be?"

"An avenging Hindoo," hazarded Dr. Johnson slily, "passing himself off as Viotti?"

"Why, no, sir, no avenging Hindoo could win such sweetness even from a Stradivarius," I owned. "Nor would any avenging Hindoo have an interest in harming even the first violinist of the age. Sure such an one had attacked Prince Orloff direct . . . Prince Orloff! Pray, Sir, how do we know that he *is* Prince Orloff? Or that yonder yellow sparkler is indeed a diamond, or ever saw the land of the Hindoos? Is not all perhaps a hoax? — the seven-foot hero and his blaze of brilliants, and Viotti's fiddle choaked with beeswax till it croaks again —"

"Nay, Bozzy, spare me this while!" cried Dr. Johnson. "Be not so fine-spun in conjecture. I cannot see that massive thumb that choaked the emperor brought to the finicking task of introducing a lozenge of wax through an f-hole with a hump-backed darning-needle, and there's an end on't."

"Yet Orloff works in my mind," continued I presently. "How if he has hypothecated his own diamond? Perhaps he has insured it at Lloyd's coffee-house, and will have its value again from the gentlemen there."

"Oh, the diamond," said Dr. Johnson. "Well, I have my eye on the diamond, never fear."

"Or perhaps," I went on, "Prince Orloff fancies his diamond, and would keep it. How long, think you, will it be his after the Empress's greedy eye has lighted upon it? How better keep it, than to noise after the story of its greatness the story of its loss?"

"At last!" Dr. Johnson breathed in relief. "St. Martin's Street!"

Dr. Burney readily assented to another gathering in his withdrawing room. A card was sent to Mr. Tresilian, and another to Prince Orloff. The Prince's reply was characteristick: "If it is the will of God His Highness will come." Mr. Tresilian, entertaining no doubts of the efficacy of his own will, as touching not only himself, but also Miss Polly and young Chinnery, sent a curt assent in the name of all three. All that remained was to make the withdrawing room fast and wait the event.

Once more the company was gathered in Dr. Burney's withdrawing

room. Once more the candlelight sparkled on Sir Isaac Newton's prisms, and the firelight warmed Miss Fanny's slender hands, busy with fresh beeswax. Once more Viotti languished, and Miss Polly mantled, and young Chinnery glowered, and old Tresilian watched the three. Once more the Bettses, neat and respectful, wore smiles unchangingly cheerful. As to Prince Orloff, he was tranced in apathy, resigned in fatalistick Russian pessimism to the will of God.

"Pray, Boswell, be so good as to assist me."

I leaped to my feet with alacrity. Dr. Johnson handed me Miss Fanny's lump of softened beeswax, with the injunction still to keep it warm.

"Good friends," he addressed the quiet circle, "we are here for a double purpose, to detect the Vandal who tampered with Signor Viotti's Stradivarius, and to discover the whereabouts of His Highness's diamond."

"If it be the will of God," said His Highness.

"If it be the will of God," said Johnson solemnly. "The lesser puzzle first. Pray, Mr. Boswell, a lump of beeswax. Mr. Betts, oblige me by setting your fore-finger to the wax."

The violin-maker looked up at him with quick intelligence; he saw what we would be at. He pressed his right fore-finger to the wax. Arthur Betts followed, staring in wonder. Miss Fanny was next. Dr. Johnson scanned each imprint eagerly through a glass.

Now we approached the group about Miss Polly Tresilian. She graciously complied with my humble request.

"Signor Viotti?"

Quick colour rushed up his dusky cheeks.

"Have I tampered with my own most precious possession?" he began hotly.

Dr. Johnson shrugged.

"Mr. Chinnery?"

"I will not, unless Signor Viotti precedes me."

Angry glances crossed. Dr. Johnson turned suddenly upon old Betts.

"You, Sir, if memory serves you are left-handed?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Then touch your left fore-finger, and do not trifle with me."

The violin-maker shrugged, and touched. Johnson scanned the imprint, and shook his head. What did he seek? Or was this perhaps but a pretence, designed to force the guilty to betray himself?

"I am brought to a standstill, unless you, Sir —" to Viotti.

Viotti shrugged, and touched. Now Johnson turned to Chinnery.

The thin young man felt every eye, and rose slowly.

"Pray, Sir, touch."

"I will not."

Quick as a snake striking Johnson had the slim wrist in his grip of iron, and pressed against the fore-finger the softened wax.

Chinnery was white as his ruffles as he nursed his wrist. "What signifies this hocus-pocus?" he demanded angrily.

Johnson produced the lump of beeswax he had brought from Betts's shop. At sight of it Chinnery went whiter yet.

"This," said my friend deliberately, "that when you tampered with Viotti's violin" — he held the young man's eyes with his in a gaze deep and full of meaning — "when you tampered with Signor Viotti's violin out of mere *spite* and *jealousy*, you left your finger-print on the wax plain as a foot-print, and a finger-print so singular that none in this room but you could have made it."

Viotti rose from the girl's side, dints of rage whitening his nose, fists clenching and unclenching; but Tresilian stopped him with a heavy hand on his arm.

"I deny it," said Chinnery in a strangled voice, "make that good."

"'Tis easily made good," said Dr. Johnson, still engaging his eyes. "I have long observed the pad of the human fore-finger . . ."

"Holy Mother," remarked Orloff, his interest finally piqued, "what a man is this, that goes about peeping at fore-fingers! To what end, in God's name?"

"Why not?" said Johnson over his shoulder, "*Nihil humanum a me alienum*. Now the human fore-finger, in the inscrutable wisdom of God, bears a pattern, as it were an eddy or a spiral, that goes to one center where the pad is highest. Never have I seen a triple center, and only twice in my life a double one — once on the finger of the Rector of St. Olave's, and once on your fore-finger, Mr. Chinnery. Now the finger-print on the wax has a double center. Was it made, think you, by the Rector of St. Olave's?"

Chinnery stood irresolute.

"Come, Mr. Chinnery," said Johnson perswasively, "this is not a crime you stand charged with, unless loving a lady too well be a crime. I counsel you, give me best, and be off with you."

Chinnery seemed to make up his mind.

"You have the right of it," he confessed, "'twas I tampered with the Italian's Stradivarius."

"Then satisfy us," cried Betts eagerly, "how you contrived to introduce a lump of beeswax through the f-hole and that without the use of my ingenious instrument."

"'Twas done by depression," muttered Chinnery. Viotti ground his teeth. "I am indifferent deft, Sir, being a lapidary, and as to your instrument, I made shift to copy it, having in my pocket a sufficiency of silver wire which I designed braiding into a ring for Polly Tresilian." His voice broke. "'Twas all for love of Polly, I could not bear he should make music with her, 'twas his playing bewitched her."

"Good lack, Tom!" cried Polly, and ran to him.

Viotti uttered a round oath in Italian, but upon his threatening motion Tresilian pinioned him. Polly had her arms about Chinnery.

"Poor, poor Tom," she murmured, "I love you best, indeed I do."

"Then be satisfied, and be off with you," said Johnson sharply. Viotti muttered curses, and wrenched against the restraining arms of Tresilian. "Take my counsel, lad, with an Englishman 'tis a word and a blow, or he takes you to law, and so an end; but a foreigner will have it out of your hide. Be off, and look to your skin."

"I'll go with you, Tom!" cried Miss Tresilian.

"Not so, Miss, you'll bide. Now be off, young Sir, and repent in time."

Quickly young Chinnery touched his lips to Polly's hand, and was gone. Polly burst into tears.

"Unhand me, Sir," said Viotti quietly to Tresilian. "You have my parole."

"A pretty comedy, Dr. Johnson," said Prince Orloff languidly. "Now for the after-piece. Where is my diamond?"

"Sir," replied Dr. Johnson, "'tis in this room. Yet I do not choose to sniff about like a dog after truffles. I shall look in my head, and find your diamond. Pray, Dr. Burney, have you ever a bowl of *poonch?* Your downright English *poonch* is a great quickener of the intellects."

"Now, Sir," said I with resolution, "you shall not take me twice in the same springe. Trust me, gentlemen, in these exact words did my learned friend engage with Bonnie Prince Charlie that he would find his missing ruby in the bottom of Miss Flora MacDonald's punch-bowl; and drown me therein if he did not know where the thing was all along!"

Dr. Johnson flashed me a look so imperious and full of meaning that my voice died in my throat.

"Nay, Dr. Burney, I do but jest," I added in a small voice, "pray let the punch-bowl be brought."

"With all my heart," cried Dr. Burney. As the punch was brewed I reflected anxiously what my venerable friend could mean with his carousing. Could he intend the thief of the diamond should become befuddled, and so betray himself? My eye lit upon Orloff, and I saw it all plainly. As the glass went round I set myself assiduously to drink with Orloff, designing he should become liquored as my friend desired. As to myself, I had no care if I could be of service to his scheams.

The chimes of St. Martin's told the hour round, an hour of toasts and pledges. I looked upon my princely charge. His countenance seemed to waver like a face under water. The moment is at hand! said I to myself.

I sought my learned friend where he stood by the punch-bowl with his back to the company, intending to impart this news to him. He held a fruit-knife in his hand, and seemed to be peeling a prune.

"The moment is unmanned," said I.

"How?" said he, dropping the prune-pit into his cup.

"Unmanned," said I.

"Alack, Bozzy, so are you," said he.

He approached Prince Orloff where he sat wabbling by the fire. The next to the last thing I remember is the triumph in his voice as he cried:

"My inebrious friend Boswell was a true prophet, your Highness. I have found your diamond — in the bottom of the punch-bowl!"

The last thing I remember is the rough feel of the carpet under my cheek.

I opened my eyes with difficulty in the morning light. Dr. Johnson seemed to be sitting at my bedside.

"How now, Bozzy," cried he with unwonted geniality, "still unmanned?"

"Yes, Sir," I replied sheepishly. "And how do all friends in St. Martin's Street —" memory began to return — "is Signor Viotti reconciled to lose his Miss and gain his Stradivarius? And has Prince Orloff indeed his Hindoo stone again?"

"He has, then," replied Dr. Johnson, "and the thief is much beholden to you for an hour's clear start."

I rose to an elbow in excitement.

"Pray tell me the story, Dr. Johnson, how came it out of the punch-bowl so pat?"

JOHNSON: "Because I put it in there."
BOSWELL: "Where did you find it?"
JOHNSON: "Where the thief had hidden it to be carried away, in a lump of beeswax affixed to the sound-post of Viotti's violin. This is an old trick of the professional jewel-thief. He'll come into a shop, and snatch up a ring or a gem while the 'prentice's back is turned, and quickly with a lump of softened beeswax he has brought with him he'll affix it to the under side of the counter. The shopman may search him all day long, he'll never find the ring; and tomorrow comes in his doxy, she knows where the beeswax is, and will quietly pick it off and carry it away."
BOSWELL: "Yet which of Dr. Burney's guests was a professional jewel-thief?"
JOHNSON: "Not one of them; but two were professional jewellers, to whom the trick is known. Neither do I think it a plot, whether against the diamond or the Stradivarius. But put yourself in the place of the young lapidary. He desires the girl, yet cannot have her without money. He sees her turning from him to a dangerous and charming new rival. He is deft and bold, and seems to himself to have lost all that makes life dear. Into his hands is passed a diamond of 50-odd carats, slightly held to a frame by a loop of soft gold. He examines it under a sconce set with prisms much the same size and shape. Now the theft of such an object, to any other man foolhardy and without profit, is to him exactly a source of pelf. He is himself a lapidary. He can cut the stone himself, thus destroying its identity, and providing himself with valuable gems that can be gradually in the course of his master's business turned to profit. It is the work of a reckless moment to substitute a prism, and make the diamond his own. Fortune favoured him, in that Miss Burney and not Orloff restored it to its place about the neck of the Prince. Now the diamond is upon his person. He cannot keep it there; the risk is enormous.

He must hide it. He remembers the jewel-thief's trick, abstracts Miss Burney's softened beeswax, and looks about for a place that cannot be searched, preferably one that he can later come at with ease. The violins! Can he affix the diamond to the *inside* of one of them, where short of taking it apart it cannot be come at? He is deft and desperate; he will try. He chooses Viotti's. From this alone we might have concluded the Bettses were innocent; they would have pitched upon their own instrument. But Chinnery *would* choose Viotti's, not only to throw the risk upon his rival, but also because Viotti frequents his master's house; it will be easiest to come at. I do not think he would have blenched at shattering the precious thing to bits to come at the diamond again."

I shuddered.

JOHNSON: "Leaving first, he could not know how his plans had gone awry when Viotti angrily repudiated the changed violin, and left it for Betts to carry away and open. And when he lay in wait for Viotti and saw him sans violin, what could he conclude but that the instrument was to seek at Burney's?"

BOSWELL: "I make sure 'twas Betts who tampered with the violin that he might make it his own; and fobbed us off with a taradiddle when we found it in his possession."

JOHNSON: "I thought otherwise when I saw 'twas beeswax had done the damage. The jewel-thief's trick flashed into my mind, and I made sure that I had recovered the Orloff diamond."

BOSWELL: "Yet how were you sure that Betts was not the thief?"

JOHNSON: "Because he yielded me the beeswax cheerfully and without a struggle, which he had not done had he hid therein a diamond worth a Mogul's ransom. Yet I had not to guess, for the finger-mark with the double eddy promised to betray the thief with certainty."

BOSWELL: "Having discovered the thief, why did you let him go?"

JOHNSON: "Because I never doubted but that Prince Orloff spoke no more than the truth when he said the thief should die — and I could not turn the boy over to death, once I had discovered the diamond. He took the warning and fled for it; though 'twas most obliging in Viotti to be in such a mighty passion with him, and so cover my meaning."

BOSWELL: "You presumed on fortune, in letting him go before you had assured yourself that you had recovered the diamond indeed."

JOHNSON: "Am I so foolish? I stripped back from the under side only enough beeswax to assure myself that it contained the Orloff diamond indeed, before ever I left the sign of the Golden Violin."

BOSWELL: "Pray, Sir, tell me one more thing: how did you account to Prince Orloff, for having found his diamond at the bottom of a bowl of punch?"

Johnson fairly laughed aloud.

"Easily. I told him 'twas the will of God."

If you like the biting and bitter story of crime and punishment, of the majesty of the law, which we now bring you — a story written by James M. Cain five years before his famous THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE *— then we earnestly suggest that you find a copy of the volume in which this story was published, James M. Cain's first book,* OUR GOVERNMENT *(Knopf, 1930). The story we have selected is called in the book "Chapter III, State Government: The Governor" — but despite the use of chapter designations, the book is a series of short stories. As the publisher wrote, the purpose of the book is "to show you what manner of men it is whom you as taxpayer support. Mr. Cain does not discourse upon them with adjective or the usual pen portrait. His is not the method of Bryce, nor even De Tocqueville, nor any of the professors. He is far more cruel and effective — and amusing . . ."*

The publisher can say that again — amusing. You will find "Citizenship" downright hilarious, if the characterization of The Governor can be described in comic terms. The Governor, you will learn, is a public servant who considers himself a "plain blunt man" — with "a worl' o' patience." He's got a heart "as big 's all outdoorsh," and his time "b'longsh t' people." Just give The Governor "th' facksh" — he won't "shtan' f' trifl'n." No, dear reader, as The Governor himself keeps insisting, you must not "shtan' 'n awe 'f" this great citizen of the republic, this great exponent of democracy.

Mr. Cain's book also deals bitingly and bitterly with The President, The Congress, The Administration of Justice, The County Government, The School System, The Sheriff, The Town Government, and The Military Forces of the United States, and in the course of Mr. Cain's call-a-spade-a-spade treatment a few crimes creep in — like treason, theft, blackmail, and murder.

CITIZENSHIP

by JAMES M. CAIN

THE GOVERNOR'S *office, about two o'clock in the afternoon. Ranged about the table, talking in whispers, are a petitioner for a pardon, dressed in ordinary clothes but having a pasty pallor, a singularly close haircut, and a habit of starting nervously whenever he is addressed; two guards, carrying guns on their hips in holsters; a witness, a prosecutor, and counsel for the petitioner.* THE GOVERNOR *enters, accompanied by a woman secretary, and they all*

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stand up until he has sat down and donned his glasses. In a moment a lovely aroma begins to perfume the air. It is such an aroma as pervades a bonded distillery, and unmistakably it comes from the head of the table, where THE GOVERNOR *has taken his place.*

THE GOVERNOR — Gen'lemen, y'may p'ceed.

COUNSEL FOR THE PETITIONER —Yes, Yexcellency.

THE GOVERNOR — 'N I'll ashk y' t' be 's brief 's y' can, c'se, 'busy af'-noon w' me. Gi' me th' facksh, that's all I want' know. 'M plain blunt man, ' got no time f' detailsh. Gi' me ' facksh, 'n y' won't have t' worry 'bout fair tream'nt f'm me.

COUNSEL — I think I speak for everybody here, Yexcellency, when I say we're all anxious to save Yexcellency's time, and —

THE GOVERNOR — 'Preciate 'at.

COUNSEL — And so I imagine the best way would be for me to sketch in for Yexcellency, briefly of course, the history of this case, I may say this very unusual case —

THE PROSECUTOR — So unusual, Yexcellency, that the Parole Board threw up its hands and refused to have anything to do with it whatsoever, and that is why Yexcellency's valuable time —

THE GOVERNOR — Nev' min' ' Parole Board. Is 't mer'tor's case, tha's all ' want ' know.

THE PROSECUTOR — I understand that, Yexcellency. I only wanted to say that the prawscution regards this case as abslutely prepawstrous.

THE GOVERNOR — A' right. Y' said it.

COUNSEL — Now Yexcellency, this young man Greenfield Farms, this young man you see here —

THE GOVERNOR — One mom'nt. When's ex'cution take plashe?

COUNSEL — I'm glad Yexcellency reminded me of that, because praps I ought to have explained it sooner. Fact of the matter, Yexcellency, this is not a capital case —

THE GOVERNOR — Gi' me facksh, gi' me facksh! I got no time f' detailsh. When's ex'cution take plashe, I said.

COUNSEL — Yes, Yexcellency. I was only telling Yexcellency that there won't be any execution, because —

THE GOVERNOR — Wha's 'at?

COUNSEL — Because this young man Farms wasn't sentenced to death; he was sentenced to the penitentiary —

THE GOVERNOR — Oh!

COUNSEL — On a ten-year term, ten years in prison, for participation in the armed march we had some years ago, when the miners made all that trouble. Or, as it's never been clear in my mind that Farms had any idea what he was doing at that time —

THE PETITIONER — Never did. I hope my die I just went out there to see what was going on —

A GUARD — Hey! Sh!

COUNSEL — Praps I should have said alleged participation.

THE PROSECUTOR — And another

thing praps you should have said was that of his ten years in prison he has already served three and he'll get two more off for good behavior and that leaves five and five is a little different from ten.

THE GOVERNOR — C'me on, c'me on!

THE PROSECUTOR — I'm only —

THE GOVERNOR — Y' pett'fogg'n. Shu' up.

COUNSEL — Now, Yexcellency will recall that as a result of that uprising, six defendants, of which Farms was one, were convicted of treason to the State and the rest were allowed to plead guilty of unlawful assemblage —

THE GOVERNOR — Don't was' m' time talk'n 'bout 'at upris'n. I know all 'bout it. I 's right there 'n saw fi' thous'n of 'm march by m' own front ya'd. Get on ' th' facksh.

COUNSEL — Then if Yexcellency is familiar with that, we're ready now for this witness, and after he has told his story I can outline briefly to Yexcellency the peculiar bearing it has on this case, and —

THE GOVERNOR — Is 'at ' witness?

THE WITNESS — Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR — Sit over here where I c'n see y' better. 'N don't shtan' 'n awe 'f me. Washa name?

THE WITNESS — Ote Bailey, sir.

THE GOVERNOR — Shpeak right out, Bailey. M' ' plain blunt man 'n y' needn't shtan' 'n awe 'f me.

COUNSEL — Now Bailey, if you'll tell the Governor in your own words what you told the Parole Board —

THE WITNESS — Well, it was like this. I was coming down the street on the milk wagon early in the morning, right down Center street in Coal City, and it was cold and there was a thin skim of ice on the street. And the mare was a-slipping and sliding pretty near every step, because she was old and the cheap dairy company hadn't shoed her right for cold weather. And —

THE GOVERNOR — Wha's 'at? Milk wagon?

COUNSEL — Just a moment, Yexcellency. Now Bailey, you forgot to tell the Governor when this was.

THE WITNESS — This here was twenty-three year ago come next January.

COUNSEL — All right, now go ahead and —

THE GOVERNOR — Hol' on, Bailey, hol' on. (*To Counsel*) Young man, I got ' worl' o' patience. M' plain blunt man, al's will'n t' help people 'n distress, p'ticularly when . . . p'ticularly . . . p'ticularly . . . h'm . . . p'ticularly. But wha's twen'-three yea's 'go got t' do 'th 'is ex'cution? Tell me that.

COUNSEL — Well, Yexcellency, I thought it would save time if we let Bailey tell his story first, and then I can outline the bearing it has on this case.

THE GOVERNOR — Young man, 're you trifl'n 'th me?

COUNSEL — Not at all, Yexcellency, I —

THE GOVERNOR — I warn y' ri' now I won't shtan' f' trifl'n. Facksh, facksh, tha's what I want!

COUNSEL — Yes, Yexcellency.

THE GOVERNOR — A' right, Bailey, g' on 'th it. I'll see 'f I c'n get ' facksh m'self.

THE WITNESS — So pretty soon the mare went down. She went right down in the shafts, and I seen I would have to unhook her to get her up.

THE GOVERNOR — Y' right, y' qui' right. Y' can't get 'm up 'thout y' unhook 'm. No use try'n. G' on.

THE WITNESS — So then I got down offen the wagon and commence unhooking her. And I just got one breeching unwrapped, cause they didn't have snap breechings then, when I heared something.

THE GOVERNOR — Whasha hear?

THE WITNESS — I heared a mewling.

THE GOVERNOR — Mewl'n?

THE WITNESS — That's right. First off, sound like a cat, but then it didn't sound like no cat. Sound funny.

THE GOVERNOR — What ' sound like?

THE WITNESS — Sound like a child.

THE GOVERNOR — Y' sure?

THE WITNESS — Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR — Soun' like ' child. Thank God, now 'm gett'n some facksh. G' on. What 'en?

THE WITNESS — So I left the mare, left her laying right where she was, and commence looking around to see where it was coming from.

THE GOVERNOR — Where *what* was com'n f'm?

THE WITNESS — This here mewling.

THE GOVERNOR — Oh, yes. Mewl'n. F'got f' mom'nt. G' on, Bailey. Shpeak right out. What 'en?

THE WITNESS — So pretty soon I figured it must be coming from the sewer, what run right down under Center street, and I went over to the manhole and listened, and sure enough that was where it was coming from.

THE GOVERNOR — Shew'r?

THE WITNESS — Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR — Keep right on, Bailey. Y' g' me more facksh 'n fi' minutes 'n whole pack ' lawyersh gi' me 'n ' week.

COUNSEL — I assure Yexcellency —

THE GOVERNOR — Keep out o' this, young man. Y' tried m' patience 'nough already. 'M after facksh 'n 'm gett'n 'm. G' on, Bailey.

THE WITNESS — So I tried to get the cover offen the manhole, but I couldn't lift it. I tried hard as I could, but I couldn't budge it.

THE GOVERNOR — Busha tried?

THE WITNESS — Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR — Thasha shtuff! G' on.

THE WITNESS — So then I figured the best thing was to get some help and I run all the way up and down the street looking for a cop. And pretty soon I found a couple of them. And first off, they didn't believe it, but then when they come to the manhole and heared this here mewling, they tried to lift the cover with me, and all three of us couldn't move it, and why we couldn't move it was it was froze to the rim.

THE GOVERNOR — F'oze?

THE WITNESS — Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR — F'oze. G' on.

THE WITNESS — So then we figured the best thing to do would be to put in a alarm. We figured if we got the fire company down there maybe they would have something to move it with.

THE GOVERNOR — G' on. Keep right on till I tell y' to shtop, Bailey.

THE WITNESS — So we went to the box and put in a alarm. And pretty soon here come the hook-and-ladder galloping down the street. And five fellows what was members of the Coal City Volunteer Fire Department was on it, because they was still setting in the firehouse playing a poker game what they had started the night before after supper.

THE GOVERNOR — The Coal City Vol'teer Fi' D'pa'ment?

THE WITNESS — Yes, sir. So then —

THE GOVERNOR — Wait ' minute. Wait ' minute, Bailey. Y' touch m' heart now. The ol' Coal City Vol'teer Fi' D'pa'ment, wha' y' know 'bout 'at? I was mem' that m'self. I was ' mem' that — lessee, mus' been thirty yea's 'go.

COUNSEL — I hear it was a wonderful company in those days, Yexcellency.

THE GOVERNOR — Won'ful 'n 'en some. We won ' State ca'nival three times runn'n.

COUNSEL — You don't mean it, Yexcellency!

THE GOVERNOR — Well, well! Y' touch m' hea't now, Bailey, y' cert'ny have. 'S goin' be ha'd f' me t' send y' t' chair 'f y' was mem' old Coal City Vol'teer Fi' D'pa'ment. G' on. What 'en?

THE WITNESS — ?

COUNSEL — Don't sit there with your mouth hanging open like that, Bailey. The Governor was thinking of something else, of course.

THE WITNESS — Oh! So then them fellows pulled in their horses and got down offen the hook-and-ladder and commence hollering where was the fire. So we told them it wasn't no fire but a child down the sewer, and then they got sore, because they claim we broke up their poker game and it was roodles.

THE GOVERNOR — What 'en?

THE WITNESS — So we ast them to help us get the cover off, and they wasn't going to do it. But just then this here mewling come again, just a little bit. It had kind of died off, but now it started up again, and them fellows, soon as they heared it, they got busy. Cause this here mewling, it give you the shivers right up and down your back.

THE GOVERNOR — What 'en?

THE WITNESS — So then we put the blade of one of them axes next to the cover, between it and the rim, and beat on it with another ax. And that broke it loose and we got it off.

THE GOVERNOR — What 'en?

THE WITNESS — So then them firemen put a belt on me, what they use to hook on the hose when they shove it up on them ladders, and let me down in the sewer. And I struck a match and sure enough there was the child, all wrapped up

in a bunch of rags laying out on the sewer water. And why it hadn't sunk was that the sewer water was froze, and a good thing we didn't shove no ladder down there because if we had the ice would of got broke and the child would of fell in.

THE GOVERNOR — What 'en?

THE WITNESS — So I grabbed the child, and them fellows pulled me up, and then we all got on the hook-and-ladder and whipped up them horses for the Coal City Hospital, 'cause it looked like to me that child was half froze to death, but when we give it in to the hospital we found out that being in the sewer hadn't hurt it none and it was all right.

THE GOVERNOR — So y' saved ' child?

THE WITNESS — Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR — Tha's good! . . . Well, Bailey, y' made ' good case f' y'self. I don't min' say'n, 'm 'pressed.

COUNSEL — But this witness isn't quite finished with his testimony, Yexcellency.

THE GOVERNOR — Wha's 'at? He saved ' child, didn' he? 'A's all ' wan' know. Facksh, facksh, tha's what I go on!

COUNSEL — But Yexcellency —

THE GOVERNOR — A' right, a' right. G' on, Bailey, what 'en?

THE WITNESS — So then, when I got back to the milk wagon, and unwrapped the other breeching and unslipped the traces, the old mare couldn't get up nohow. She was stiff from cold, and I had to get them cops again and shoot her. So the dairy company was pretty sore. The old mare, she weren't worth more'n twenty-five dollars, but them company men let on I was hired to take care of the company property and not pull no babies outen the sewer.

THE GOVERNOR — What 'en?

THE WITNESS— So we had it pretty hot for a while, and then later on that day I went down to the hospital for to look at the baby and got them nurses there to name him Greenfield Farms, what was the name of the dairy company, so when they put it in the Coal City *News* about the baby being found the company would get a free ad outen it, anyway twenty-five dollars' worth, what was the worth of the mare, and they did.

THE GOVERNOR — What 'en?

THE WITNESS — Well, I reckon that's all. 'Cepting I picked up the paper about six months ago, and I seen where a fellow name of Greenfield Farms had spoke a piece at a entertainment what they had in the penitentiary, and I got to wondering if it was the same one, and I asked one or two people about it, and they sent me to this gentleman here, and come to find out it was.

COUNSEL — So Yexcellency can see that this young man here, this young man Greenfield Farms, is one and the same with the child this witness pulled out of the sewer twenty-three years ago.

THE GOVERNOR — 'N 'a's all?

THE WITNESS — Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR — Well, Bailey, ' don' min' say'n' y' touch m' hea't. The ol' Coal City Vol'teer Fi' D'pa'ment, wha' y' know 'bout 'at?

COUNSEL — Now, Yexcellency, you've heard the story of this witness, I may say the truly remarkable story of this witness, which I think Yexcellency will agree had the stamp of truth all over it —

THE GOVERNOR — The ol' Coal City Vol'teer Fi' D'pa'ment. . . !

COUNSEL — A story, praps I should add, that we are prepared to substantiate in every particular from the hospital records, which we will leave with Yexcellency, and I may call Yexcellency's attention to this certificate in particular which states that the child was at least a month old when it was admitted, and —

THE GOVERNOR — Now wha's all 'is got t' do 'th pa'don f' Bailey?

COUNSEL — Farms, Yexcellency.

THE GOVERNOR — Farmsh 'en?

COUNSEL — I'm coming to that, Yexcellency. Now the salient point about this evidence, Yexcellency, is that it establishes beyond any reasonable doubt in my mind, that there is nowhere in existing records any proof of Farms's citizenship. He was, I remind Yexcellency, a month old when admitted to the Coal City Hospital. And what does that prove? It proves, Yexcellency, that he *might* have been born almost anywhere on the whole face of the earth. He *might* have been born anywhere from Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand. He is, so far as documentary proof to the contrary goes, Yexcellency, the *most* unfortunate being, I may say that *pitiable* being, who can claim *no* land as his own, being *nothing* more or less, Yexcellency, as the fellow says, a man without a country!

THE GOVERNOR — Well, well, well. I ashk y' f' facksh 'n now y' begin shpout'n poetry at me. Man 'thout country, hunh? Tha's in'st'n.

COUNSEL — Now I remind Yexcellency once more that the crime of which Farms stands convicted is treason. And treason is unique among crimes, Yexcellency, in that before any man can be *convicted* of it, his *citizenship* must be established, beyond all *shadow* of doubt, because *TREASON*, Yexcellency, as all the *AUTHORITIES* agree —

THE GOVERNOR — Shtop yell'n!

COUNSEL — Yes, Yexcellency — implies a *ALLEGIANCE* — a allegiance to the State against which it is alleged to have been committed. And under the law —

THE GOVERNOR — Law? Law? Y' talk'n t' me 'bout law?

COUNSEL — Yes, Yexcellency, and —

THE GOVERNOR — Washa com'n t' me 'bout law for? Why 'nsha go t' court 'bout law?

COUNSEL — We've been to court, Yexcellency. We applied to the Supreme Court two months ago for a new trial, on the basis of the evi-

dence which Yexcellency has just listened to, and which, praps I should have explained sooner, was not presented at the original trial because Farms had no idea at that time of the importance of his citizenship, and neglected to inform me of the peculiar circumstances attending his birth. And the court denied the application, on the ground that while this evidence, if it *had* been presented at the trial, *might* have resulted in the granting of a motion to dismiss, it could not properly be regarded as *new* evidence, as it is essentially evidence of *lack* of evidence on the part of the State, rather than *direct* evidence of innocence.

THE PROSECUTOR — In other words, Yexcellency is being asked to certify that if the dog hadn't stopped to scratch fleas he would have caught the rabbit.

COUNSEL — Not in the least, Yexcellency —

THE GOVERNOR — Y' know what? Y' both ' pair ' pett'fogg'n lawyersh. Y' 'sgrace t' bar. Farmsh! C'me here. I'll do this m'self. Sit there, where ' c'n see y'.

THE PETITIONER — Yes, sir. Thank you, sir, Governor.

THE GOVERNOR — A' right, Farmsh, shpeak right up now. Y' needn't shtan' 'n awe 'f me. 'M plain blunt man 'n got hea't 's big 's all outdoorsh. Washa got ' say f' y'self?

THE PETITIONER — Governor, all I got to say is I went out there when them miners was gathering by the creek forks just to see what was going on —

THE GOVERNOR — Thasha shtuff! Facksh! Motivesh! Tha's wha' ' want. G' on, Farmsh. What 'en?

THE PETITIONER — And then when they marched down the road, I went along with them just for fun.

THE GOVERNOR — Now we com'n. G' on.

THE PETITIONER — And then they sent me up. And . . . and . . .

THE GOVERNOR — Farmsh, now I ask y' some'n. If I was t' set y' free, what would y' do 'th y' lib'ty?

THE PETITIONER — If you was to set me free, Governor, the first thing I would do would be to go to the judge and get my citizenship fixed up —

THE PROSECUTOR — That's great! I'll say that's great! There you are, Yexcellency, right out of their own mouths! First this man isn't guilty because maybe the prawscution couldn't have proved his citizenship. And the first thing he's going to do if he gets a pardon is to get his citizenship fixed up! If that doesn't —

COUNSEL — Not at all, Yexcellency. In fact, I resent the imputation of —

THE GOVERNOR — Shtop! F' God's sake shtop! (*To the secretary*) C'mute ' sen'ce 'mpris'nment f' life!

THE PETITIONER — What? Oh my God!

THE PROSECUTOR — Hunh?

COUNSEL — But, Yexcellency —

THE GOVERNOR — No more! 'M not g'n lis'n ' 'nother word! 'S comp'-mise. 'S comp'mise, I know it's comp'mise. But 's bes' ' c'n do. Who y' think y' are, tak'n up my time ' way y' have? Don' min' f' m'self. 'M plain blunt man 'n give y' shirt off m' back 'f y' need it. But my time b'longsh t' people. Y' und'shtan' 'at? My time b'longsh t' people, 'n wha' y' do with it? I ashk y' f' facksh 'n y' come in here 'th noth'n but tech'calitiesh! Tech'-calitiesh I said! Pett'fogg'n! Trifl'n detailsh! Dog! Fleash! Rabbit! Poetry! 'M done with it! 'M not g'n lis'n 'nother word!

COUNSEL — But really, Yexcellency, —

THE PETITIONER — Yeah, a fine lawyer you was! First you git me sent up for ten years and now you git me sent up for life —

THE WITNESS — Yeah, and a fine thing the Coal City Volunteer Fire Department done for the country when they pulled you out of the sewer —

THE GOVERNOR — Wha's 'at? Wha's 'at?

COUNSEL — I'm just trying to tell Yexcellency —

THE GOVERNOR — Jus' minute, jus' minute! . . . The ol' Coal City Vol'teer Fi' D'pa'ment! Wha' y' know 'bout 'at? So Farmsh, y' were mem' ol' Coal City Vol'teer Fi' D'pa'ment?

THE PETITIONER — Well . . . I reckon I was, in a way, Governor. I reckon I was, ha ha! I reckon I was kind of born to it, ha ha ha! I reckon I must be pretty near the only person in the world that was ever born to a fire department.

THE GOVERNOR — Farmsh, 'm g'n ask y' some'n. Look m' 'n ' eye, Farmsh. Farmsh, y' guilty 'r y' not guilty?

THE PETITIONER — Governor, I hope my die I ain't no more guilty than you are.

THE GOVERNOR — Farmsh, I believe y' tell'n' me ' truth. Farmsh, y' free man.

THE PETITIONER — Oh my Gawd, Governor, thank you sir, thank . . . !

THE GOVERNOR — The ol' Coal City Vol'teer Fi' D'pa'ment. Wha' y' know 'bout 'at? Wha' y' know 'bout 'at? . . .

While the Secretary makes out a pardon and the GOVERNOR *signs it, the group breaks up in a round of handshaking, the lawyers to go out and have a drink together, the petitioner to go back to the penitentiary for the last formalities. When they have all gone, the* GOVERNOR *still sits nodding to himself, and presently falls amiably asleep.*

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Gilbert Thomas's "Natural Selection" is one of the eight "first stories" which won special awards in last year's contest. It is a powerful tale to have been written by a beginner. The atmosphere, characterization, and mood dig deeper and deeper under your skin, and by the time you have finished the story there is only one word to describe your experience — shocking.

Gilbert Thomas is in his late twenties, married, and has two sons; the older boy is called Humperdink and the younger Johnny. The author earns his living as a writer-producer for the American Broadcasting Company, in San Francisco (KGO). His most gratifying success in radio was the production, writing, and direction of a half-hour show called "Are These Our Children?" This program was based on case histories from the files of the Juvenile Court. The show won the National Award given by the Ohio State Conference on Education in Radio, and was second-place winner in the awards made by America's Town Meeting of the Air. In the mystery field, Mr. Thomas has written radio scripts for "The Whistler," but the limitations, taboos, and inescapable rewriting which radio imposes are beginning to get Mr. Thomas down.

"Natural Selection" is Mr. Thomas's first short story. Every beginner is influenced by the other writers whom he reads and admires. Gilbert Thomas owes his allegiance, for the present, to the illustrious literary line which includes Hemingway, Wolfe, Joyce, and Faulkner.

A few words on the title of the story — for the benefit not only of readers but of the author himself. Mr. Thomas's own title was "Butter, Craw and L.A." — which we considered too diffuse. We changed the title (an incorrigible habit of ours) to "Natural Selection" — in the Darwinian sense of the term. Herbert Spencer expressed the meaning we have in mind when he wrote: "This survival of the fittest . . . is that which Mr. Darwin has called 'natural selection'."

NATURAL SELECTION

by GILBERT THOMAS

HELL. I'm cookin' here," Butter said.

"Then get back in the car," Craw said.

"Damned if I will."

"Then shut up."

"Bake in the car. Fry out here."

"All right. Only shut up about it."

The fat one hesitated. "I'm sorry, Craw," he said.

"Yeah."

Craw wanted to stand up but he didn't. The sun cut across the car at the three o'clock angle, puddling hot shadows next to the running-board. Craw crouched there, working on two tin containers; they were hot in his hands. He'd been hammering and cutting at the cans for almost an hour. He wanted to stretch his back, to look down the road for any sign of an approaching car. But he didn't want to face that sun.

"Take a look down the road," Craw said.

"Ain't nothing comin'," Butter said. But he put a fleshy hand on the running-board and wheezed to his feet. Craw had that look on his face when he's mad, and Butter knew he'd best stand up and look down the road. He did, breathing in the scorched air, feeling it burn his face, water his eyes. Nothing. To the north the dirt road stretched straight and empty. To the south it wound out of sight behind the red rocks. Nothing.

"See anything?" Craw was working again.

"Not even a lizard."

"Any dust?"

"I said there was nothin'." Butter squatted full in the slim shadow and began dabbing at his sweat with a blue rag.

They'd started three days ago, started from a small desert town that had one gas station, a general store, and no hotel. It was to be a prospecting trip, but all they really expected to find was a good time.

Their old car had been piled high with canned food, camping gear, tools, and bagged-water. Craw had fixed the car before they had left. "She may be old," he'd said, "but she'll do."

And Butter'd said, "You're the boss," because Craw had been a mechanic in Los Angeles. But she hadn't done. Hadn't done at all. Maybe it was because Butter had forgotten to pack the ten-quart tin of oil, and he didn't want Craw to get mad, so he didn't tell him. Craw would sit in the car while Butter would check the oil in the crankcase and the water in the radiator. And Butter would always say, "She's perkin'."

Everything might have been all right if it hadn't been for one jagged rock that had fallen from a cliff overhanging the road. The car had hit the rock, the rock had punctured the crankcase. In time the motor had exploded with friction-heat, two pistons punching through the cast-iron block.

And so they waited beside their dead car, waited through part of the canned food, all the water. Nothing came. . . .

Craw, still crouched, still working on the tin cans, listened to the fat one's dry breathing. Butter. Everyone called him that because of his fat. His skin, stretched tight over his slob, was somehow yellow. Even after being in the sun — how long had it

been? — it was still somehow yellow. Butter. Was anyone ever so fat? Butter liked greasy soups, Butter liked fat meat, pie, potatoes, soda pop — and slim girls. Craw wondered why he'd ever teamed up with the ball of butter. He didn't like him. But he'd been good for laughs, and the slim girls hadn't gone for Butter. Now, hearing him breathing that way, and smelling his body pouring sweat next to him in the car's shadow, and remembering the oil . . .

"Hey! You nuts?" Butter yelled, rolling out of the way of Craw's fists.

"You stinkin' two-ton . . . !"

"Craw!"

"I'll kill you!" Craw heard his voice getting away from him, getting higher. He felt his fists hit and disappear in flesh. He wondered if Butter could feel it somewhere deep under that fat, down where his bones began. It was easy. Too easy. He stopped. And he was sorry. "You all right?"

"I'm — I'm all right," Butter said.

"Take the bottom can and drain out what's left in the radiator."

"All right, Craw."

Butter drained the radiator and brought the rusty water back to Craw. There wasn't much. Craw started a small greasewood fire and began to distill the water.

"I wouldn't have thought of that, Craw," Butter said happily.

"Someone's got to do some thinking."

"Maybe when you finish we'd better take the water and start walking back?"

"Back where?"

"Remember, maybe twenty miles back, that old house?"

"You feel like walking twenty miles?"

Butter closed his eyes and cried. But his sweat had stopped and there were no tears.

"L.A. I been thinking about L.A.," Butter said.

"L.A.," but Craw didn't say it the way the fat one had.

"You never did like it."

"It stinks."

"It's my home, Craw."

"That all you can think about."

"It's my home town."

"This is your home town now."

"No, it's not, Craw."

"Stop talking and shut up."

"I been thinking maybe I'm going to die."

"Yeah. Sure."

"Ain't you ever thought of that, Craw?"

"Everybody's got to die sometime."

"I always thought when I died it would be in L.A."

"I'm outta that town and I'm staying out," Craw said. "It never did me no good, and I'm not dying here *or* there."

"If I die, Craw, would you take me back to L.A.?"

"Yeah. Sure. If you die."

Somewhere a small animal made a sound. It was evening. Heat hung in the air, undecided, not knowing where to go, but lifting. The hard soil was

the floor of an oven that would radiate heat for another three hours. Then cold.

Butter sat on the running-board. He hawked but couldn't spit. He tongued the dust on his lips, then lifted a tin can and took a drink.

"Better start walking," Craw said. "Better start tonight."

Butter lowered the can. He shook it. Maybe a pint.

"Which way?" Butter asked.

"To the house."

"What if it's empty?"

"I thought it was your idea to walk back there?"

"I was only . . ." His voice dropped off.

"It won't be empty."

"Maybe if we went the other way?"

"To the house."

"Okay."

"Let's go," Craw said.

They left. Craw took the tin of water and walked ahead. Butter followed. They didn't look back.

All night? Had they walked all night? Or had it been a day and a night, or two days? They walked. Craw always a little in front. Butter stumbling, swinging slowly from one side of the road to the other: a soft, round pendulum. The road: hammered dirt at crazy angles and Butter stumbling. Craw could hear him breathing hard, and once the fat one whimpered, and once he cried. But they never stopped. The water was gone now — when had they had the last of it? — and they remembered nothing but the ruts hard as concrete, their ankles turning, the swing in the road ahead. But no house. Another mile, nothing ahead. Then Craw stopped.

"It's . . . up ahead." Craw didn't recognize his voice.

Butter tried to call out, but the sound he made was the whistle without the pea.

The house was the color of the dust it sat in. Lost in the desert with Butter and Craw. A monument to a man with arthritis who died there seeking a cure. Dry. Empty. They stood there and looked. The house was a shack of dry boards. Cracks between the boards. The floor had dropped at one end, throwing the room into lunacy. No furniture, but there was a frying pan on the wall near where the stove had been. On the floor was an empty bottle labeled Dr.-something's Muscle Liniment. One room, that's all it was, with a door in the front and one in the back. Craw tried to cuss and almost did as he went, half sliding, across the slanting floor towards the back door.

Butter turned his back and sat down on the ground. He could hear Craw tearing at the back door, but he wasn't thinking of that. He was thinking of a bottle of cold beer, icy drops clinging to its sides. He was running the tip of his finger up and down the bottle, rubbing the cold drops off. He was using his fingernail to play with the sopping label, pushing it this way and that. Then the

bottle in his mouth and that first rush of cold beer hitting his tongue.

There was an advertising sign in L.A. It looked like you could almost reach out and take one of the three cold dripping glasses of beer on it. Ice cream. He liked ice cream. It was a little harder to bring that back. Yes. There was that place on Beverly Blvd. almost next to Western. They had ice cream and he'd always pay extra for the second scoop. Vanilla, that was good to think about: strawberry, chocolate, please, anybody, L.A.!

"Look at this," Craw tried to say.

Butter didn't look up.

"Look," and Craw dropped the can next to Butter.

Butter turned and reached for it.

"Kerosene," Craw said. "Lousy kerosene in that can. Only thing in the place. Found it underneath the car."

"Car?"

"In back."

Butter started to his feet. Craw pushed him back.

"No use looking."

"I want to see."

Craw kicked at the kerosene can, then he reached down and hoisted Butter to his feet.

Yes, there was the car. It was standing on a small rise back of the house. There were ruts leading up to it. Whoever had left it there had used that same spot to park it all the time. The car was old.

They tried to push it. It wouldn't move. The sun, the air: they had dried up every pat of grease in the car. And there was no gas.

A solid chunk of sun-dried metal, derelict, standing on a small rise in the sun. The tires were solid rubber, the kind a smart man uses on the back roads of the desert. The spokes of the wheels had been yellow, but now they were gray, bare wood with tracings of yellow near the hubs, The car was high and narrow, the kind you seldom see in this country any more, the kind you see in Mexico. It had four doors.

Craw opened one of the doors. It opened with difficulty — it needed grease. He sat behind the thick wooden steering wheel. He pulled at the gears. Everything seemed in perfect order, but dry, not rusted.

He climbed out of the car and pushed past Butter who stood grotesquely in a squashy slump. He didn't know why, but he wanted a look at that motor. Open the hood — that's right, it comes hard, but it's open. Looks okay. Wiring? — okay. Four cylinders. Sparks? Couldn't tell yet. But even two would do. Maybe more sparks under seat, or in the tool kit. Tools? Yes, there are tools. Simple tools. But then it's a simple car. Check oil? — dry. Battery? Dead, sure. Generator brushes: sure, that's why it was always parked on this rise. If that battery ever went dead, a good push would send it rolling down; then throw her into gear and kick the clutch and she'd start. Wonder would she run on the juice generated by the brushes in the generator? And a car could run on kerosene.

He'd seen it. Plenty of noise and smoke, but it could run. And they had kerosene — at least three gallons, maybe five. Enough to get somewhere. And Craw knew they'd better get somewhere, soon.

The two men sat on the broken steps that led down from the back door of the shack. It was evening again.

"Maybe, if we went back, and . . ." Butter tried to talk.

Craw knew what he meant. "Get parts out of our car?"

"That's what I meant."

Craw tried to lift his arm. It was heavy. "You want to try?" he said, but his mind was probing the old car, and Butter.

Butter's intelligence ran to fat, and by the time that was fed there wasn't much left for the brain. Should have checked the oil myself; he always makes mistakes, so it was my fault, if it was anybody's. Too tired to beat him up any more.

And now Craw knew he was going to die, and no one was going to know about it, and that wasn't the way he'd planned on dying at all. Only Butter would know, and he was going to die too . . .

Butter had stopped thinking of cool things. As he sat there, dying: "I wish . . . I was . . . in L.A."

The old car stood high and bright in the moonlight. It was ten thirty-eight when Craw asked: "How much you weigh?"

"Three hunnert . . . twenty," Butter said, after a while.

It was past midnight.

"Help me," Craw said, rising.

The fat one sat with his arms around his knees, rolling to and fro on his roundness. He looked like he might be moaning softly to himself, but he wasn't.

" . . . with the car," Craw said. He pulled Butter to his feet with surprising strength.

He opened the hood again and began to feel the motor with his fingers, probing with his fingertips the places he had been probing with his mind. Feeling where the power would be.

"Rocks," he said, "Get rocks to put under the axle."

Trance-like the fat one wandered off to do as he was told.

All that night there was no sound but the sound of the fat one's breathing, and the clink and hammer and tap of metal on metal, as Craw worked. He knew this would be their last night. And he worked . . .

The car was up on the rocks, its wheels pulled off. The motor lay open. Wires, plugs, and metal tubes lay patterned evenly, professionally, on the hard earth. There were small mounds of nuts and bolts heaped carefully on the running-boards. The sky was purple with morning.

Butter spasmed in his sleep. Craw stood looking at him, asleep there, then he turned and started for the shack. He walked surprisingly fast.

Next to the rear door there was a heavy, round, oversize oil drum that came up as high as his chest. It had a small hole in the bottom for a draft. It had been used as an incinerator.

"Whose house he in?" the old man asked.

"Up Ned's place," a woman answered.

"Funniest lookin' car I ever saw," someone said.

"Think I saw it 'round here some years back," someone said.

"Out of his head?"

"Plumb crazy, Les said."

"Wonder how he ever got that tub out of the desert?"

It was a small town, a desert town, with one gas station, a general store, and no hotel. Now there was a cluster of people gathered around an old car parked next to the gas station. Nothing ever happened in this town, and now something was happening; so they asked questions.

"Doc's over lookin' after him," the woman said. She wore a hat and seemed to know more about it than anybody else.

"Whee!" that from a small boy, maybe ten. "It stinks."

"Yeah, don't it now," the old man said, examining the car.

"Doc think he'll live?"

"Said it all depended on how long he'd been in the desert," the woman said. "He might die."

The sun was up and it was coming down hot. The old car wasn't in the shade. The small boy made a face and held his nose, then ran to the general store for a bottle of pop. The woman with the hat left, then the rest began moving away.

Craw made his way toward the gas station, toward the car. The doctor had wanted him to rest longer, but he couldn't rest. Now he knew what he had to do.

"You all right, Buddy?" That from the man at the gas station.

"Is the car here?"

"We got lots of cars," he said. "Which one you mean?"

"The . . . old one. The . . ."

But the man interrupted. "Hey, ain't you the guy that came drivin' the old buggy off the desert? Sure, I wouldn't have recognized you," he said. "You *want* that car?"

"Where is it?"

"If you want to sell it for junk . . ."

"Where's the car?"

Then Craw saw it, standing by the road. He had the gas station attendant put gas in it.

"You're going to drive this wreck out of here?"

"Finished with that gas?"

"Yeah, but I'd better check the oil . . ."

"I've got all I need."

"Water's okay. Say, what'd you have down in that radiator . . ."

"Here's your money."

"Where you heading, Buddy?"

"L.A.," Craw said.

"Hey, you nuts?" the gas station man said. "You'll never make it."

"I'll make it," Craw said.

LEE WRIGHT SELECTS . . .

Which are the twelve best detective short stories ever written? . . . You will recall that we asked a Blue Ribbon Jury of experts to select the crème de la *crime, the best of all time, among all the detective shorts written in in the last 109 years. This Panel of Private Opinion was composed of James Hilton, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, James Sandoe, August Derleth, Viola Brothers Shore, Lee Wright, Lew D. Feldman, Charles Honce, and your Editors — representing craftsmen, critics, and connoisseurs, editors, bookdealers, and readers. The final verdict of the symposium awarded criminological crowns to the following twelve tales —* THE GOLDEN DOZEN:

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole.....by Thomas Burke
The Purloined Letter.....by Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League.....by A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance.....by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie.....by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13.....by Jacques Futrelle
The Oracle of the Dog.....by G. K. Chesterton
Naboth's Vineyard.....by Melville Davisson Post
The Gioconda Smile.....by Aldous Huxley
The Yellow Slugs.....by H. C. Bailey
The Genuine Tabard.....by E. C. Bentley
Suspicion.....by Dorothy L. Sayers

This month we bring you Melville Davisson Post's "Naboth's Vineyard," sponsored by Lee Wright who, when she finally selected this particular Uncle Abner story, wrote to your Editors that she "will give a small prize to anyone who has an easy time picking" the best of the Uncle Abner tales. Lee Wright also wrote: "It is with some bitterness that I recall my blithe acceptance of your suggestion that I send you the names of my twelve favorite mystery stories. I haven't had a moment's peace since. Titles crowd and jostle in my mind like puppies around a feeding trough. They elbow and shove, and I can even hear them squealing for attention . . . Why you didn't ask for the fifty best — but probably exactly the same thing would have happened . . ."

First and foremost, Lee Wright is the Editor of Inner Sanctum Mysteries which she originated for Simon & Schuster and which she has directed from their inception. She has also been responsible for the publication, under the Essandess imprint, of Edgar W. Smith's PROFILE BY GASLIGHT *and Howard Haycraft's* THE ART OF THE MYSTERY STORY. *She is also an associate*

editor for Pocket Books in the selection of mysteries, and for Pocket Books she edited three excellent anthologies: THE POCKET BOOK OF GREAT DETECTIVES, THE POCKET BOOK OF MYSTERY STORIES, *and* THE POCKET MYSTERY READER.

Oh, no, that is not all — not by a long shot! Lee Wright is associate editor of "The Baker Street Journal," and if memory serves is one of only two women who ever got as close to a Baker Street Irregulars dinner as the outside bar in the old Murray Hill Hotel (excepting, of course, that one public occasion when Life Went to the BSI). Lee Wright has also edited and collaborated in the writing of several radio shows, principally "Murder Clinic" for Mutual. She has written many non-fiction pieces about the mystery story, some for "Publishers' Weekly" and one that is included in THE ART OF THE MYSTERY STORY.

All in all, Lee Wright is that rare publisher's editor whom authors think of as — there is only one phrase for it — "a dream editor." She has a tremendous knowledge of her field; when something is wrong in a manuscript, she knows exactly what it is and what should be done to correct it; she has taste, tact, and tenacity. In another phrase, she is a creative *editor, stylewise and storywise.*

Now, we give you Lee Wright's candidates for all-time honors:

Naboth's Vineyard . . . . . by Melville Davisson Post
The Hands of Mr. Ottermole . . . by Thomas Burke
The Avenging Chance . . . . . by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie . . . . by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13 . . . . . by Jacques Futrelle
The Man in the Passage . . . . . by G. K. Chesterton
The Sweet Shot . . . . . by E. C. Bentley
The Haunted Policeman . . . . . by Dorothy L. Sayers
Gulf Stream Green . . . . . by Frederick Irving Anderson
The Footprint in the Sky . . . . . by Carter Dickson
The Two Bottles of Relish . . . . . by Lord Dunsany
Footprints in the Jungle . . . . . by W. Somerset Maugham

We should call your attention to the fact that in making her selections, and for reasons best known to herself, Lee Wright "ruthlessly eliminated everything but 20th Century stories." Have you any idea, Miss Wright asked in anguish, how horrible it is to be ruthless with Poe and Conan Doyle? Yes, we do have an idea, and as one aficionado to another, how in the name of homicidal history did you do it?

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

One hears a good deal about the sovereignty of the people in this republic; and many persons imagine it a sort of fiction, and wonder where it lies, who are the guardians of it, and how they would exercise it if the forms and agents of the law were removed. I am not one of those who speculate upon this mystery, for I have seen this primal ultimate authority naked at its work. And, having seen it, I know how mighty and how dread a thing it is. And I know where it lies, and who are the guardians of it, and how they exercise it when the need arises.

There was a great crowd, for the whole country was in the courtroom. It was a notorious trial.

Elihu Marsh had been shot down in his house. He had been found lying in a room, with a hole through his body that one could put his thumb in. He was an irascible old man, the last of his family, and so, lived alone. He had rich lands, but only a life estate in them, the remainder was to some foreign heirs. A girl from a neighboring farm came now and then to bake and put his house in order, and he kept a farm hand about the premises.

Nothing had been disturbed in the house when the neighbors found Marsh; no robbery had been attempted, for the man's money, a considerable sum, remained on his body.

There was not much mystery about the thing, because the farm hand had disappeared. This man was a stranger in the hills. He had come from over the mountains some months before, and gone to work for Marsh. He was a big blond man, young and good looking; of better blood, one would say, than the average laborer. He gave his name as Taylor, but he was not communicative, and little else about him was known.

The country was raised, and this man was overtaken in the foothills of the mountains. He had his clothes tied into a bundle, and a long-barreled fowling-piece on his shoulder. The story he told was that he and Marsh had settled that morning, and he had left the house at noon, but that he had forgotten his gun and had gone back for it; had reached the house about four o'clock, gone into the kitchen, got his gun down from the dogwood forks over the chimney, and at once left the house. He had not seen Marsh, and did not know where he was.

He admitted that this gun had been loaded with a single huge lead bullet. He had so loaded it to kill a dog that sometimes approached the house, but not close enough to be reached with a load of shot. He affected surprise

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when it was pointed out that the gun had been discharged. He said that he had not fired it, and had not, until then, noticed that it was empty. When asked why he had so suddenly determined to leave the country, he was silent.

He was carried back and confined in the county jail, and now, he was on trial at the September term of the circuit court.

The court sat early. Although the judge, Simon Kilrail, was a landowner and lived on his estate in the country some half dozen miles away, he rode to the courthouse in the morning, and home at night, with his legal papers in his saddle-pockets. It was only when the court sat that he was a lawyer. At other times he harvested his hay and grazed his cattle, and tried to add to his lands like any other man in the hills, and he was as hard in a trade and as hungry for an acre as any.

It was the sign and insignia of distinction in Virginia to own land. Mr. Jefferson had annulled the titles that George the Third had granted, and the land alone remained as a patent of nobility. The Judge wished to be one of these landed gentry, and he had gone a good way to accomplish it. But when the court convened he became a lawyer and sat upon the bench with no heart in him, and a cruel tongue like the English judges.

I think everybody was at this trial. My Uncle Abner and the strange old doctor, Storm, sat on a bench near the center aisle of the court-room, and I sat behind them, for I was a half-grown lad, and permitted to witness the terrors and severities of the law.

The prisoner was the center of interest. He sat with a stolid countenance like a man careless of the issues of life. But not everybody was concerned with him, for my Uncle Abner and Storm watched the girl who had been accustomed to bake for Marsh and red up his house.

She was a beauty of her type; dark haired and dark eyed like a gypsy, and with an April nature of storm and sun. She sat among the witnesses with a little handkerchief clutched in her hands. She was nervous to the point of hysteria, and I thought that was the reason the old doctor watched her. She would be taken with a gust of tears, and then throw up her head with a fine defiance; and she kneaded and knotted and worked the handkerchief in her fingers. It was a time of stress and many witnesses were unnerved, and I think I should not have noticed this girl but for the whispering of Storm and my Uncle Abner.

The trial went forward, and it became certain that the prisoner would hang. His stubborn refusal to give any reason for his hurried departure had but one meaning, and the circumstantial evidence was conclusive. The motive, only, remained in doubt, and the Judge had charged on this with so many cases in point, and with so heavy a hand, that any virtue in it was removed. The Judge was hard against this man, and indeed there was little

sympathy anywhere, for it was a foul killing — the victim an old man and no hot blood to excuse it.

In all trials of great public interest, where the evidences of guilt overwhelmingly assemble against a prisoner, there comes a moment when all the people in the court-room, as one man, and without a sign of the common purpose, agree upon a verdict; there is no outward or visible evidence of this decision, but one feels it, and it is a moment of the tensest stress.

The trial of Taylor had reached this point, and there lay a moment of deep silence, when this girl sitting among the witnesses suddenly burst into a very hysteria of tears. She stood up shaking with sobs, her voice choking in her throat, and the tears gushing through her fingers.

What she said was not heard at the time by the audience in the court-room, but it brought the Judge to his feet and the jury crowding about her, and it broke down the silence of the prisoner, and threw him into a perfect fury of denials. We could hear his voice rise above the confusion, and we could see him struggling to get to the girl and stop her. But what she said was presently known to everybody, for it was taken down and signed; and it put the case against Taylor, to use a lawyer's term, out of court.

The girl had killed Marsh herself. And this was the manner and the reason of it: She and Taylor were sweethearts and were to be married. But they had quarreled the night before Marsh's death and the following morning Taylor had left the country. The point of the quarrel was some remark that Marsh had made to Taylor touching the girl's reputation. She had come to the house in the afternoon, and finding her lover gone, and maddened at the sight of the one who had robbed her of him, had taken the gun down from the chimney and killed Marsh. She had then put the gun back into its place and left the house. This was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and about an hour before Taylor returned for his gun.

There was a great veer of public feeling with a profound sense of having come at last upon the truth, for the story not only fitted to the circumstantial evidence against Taylor, but it fitted also to his story and it disclosed the motive for the killing. It explained, too, why he had refused to give the reason for his disappearance. That Taylor denied what the girl said and tried to stop her in her declaration, meant nothing except that the prisoner was a man, and would not have the woman he loved make such a sacrifice for him.

I cannot give all the forms of legal procedure with which the closing hours of the court were taken up, but nothing happened to shake the girl's confession. Whatever the law required was speedily got ready, and she was remanded to the care of the sheriff in order that she might come before the court in the morning.

Taylor was not released, but was also held in custody, although the

case against him seemed utterly broken down. The Judge refused to permit the prisoner's counsel to take a verdict. He said that he would withdraw a juror and continue the case. But he seemed unwilling to release any clutch of the law until some one was punished for this crime.

It was on our way, and we rode out with the Judge that night. He talked with Abner and Storm about the pastures and the price of cattle, but not about the trial, as I hoped he would do, except once only, and then it was to inquire why the prosecuting attorney had not called either of them as witnesses, since they were the first to find Marsh, and Storm had been among the doctors who examined him. And Storm had explained how he had mortally offended the prosecutor in his canvass, by his remark that only a gentleman should hold office. He did but quote Mr. Hamilton, Storm said, but the man had received it as a deadly insult, and thereby proved the truth of Mr. Hamilton's expression, Storm added. And Abner said that as no circumstance about Marsh's death was questioned, and others arriving about the same time had been called, the prosecutor doubtless considered further testimony unnecessary.

The Judge nodded, and the conversation turned to other questions. At the gate, after the common formal courtesy of the country, the Judge asked us to ride in, and, to my astonishment, Abner and Storm accepted his invitation. I could see that the man was surprised, and I thought annoyed, but he took us into his library.

I could not understand why Abner and Storm had stopped here, until I remembered how from the first they had been considering the girl, and it occurred to me that they thus sought the Judge in the hope of getting some word to him in her favor. A great sentiment had leaped up for this girl. She had made a staggering sacrifice, and with a headlong courage, and it was like these men to help her if they could.

And it was to speak of the woman that they came, but not in her favor. And while Simon Kilrail listened, they told this extraordinary story: They had been of the opinion that Taylor was not guilty when the trial began, but they had suffered it to proceed in order to see what might develop. The reason was that there were certain circumstantial evidences, overlooked by the prosecutor, indicating the guilt of the woman and the innocence of Taylor. When Storm examined the body of Marsh he discovered that the man had been killed by poison, and was dead when the bullet was fired into his body. This meant that the shooting was a fabricated evidence to direct suspicion against Taylor. The woman had baked for Marsh on this morning, and the poison was in the bread which he had eaten at noon.

Abner was going on to explain something further, when a servant entered and asked the Judge what time it was. The man had been greatly

impressed, and he now sat in a profound reflection. He took his watch out of his pocket and held it in his hand, then he seemed to realize the question and replied that his watch had run down. Abner gave the hour, and said that perhaps his key would wind the watch. The Judge gave it to him, and he wound it and laid it on the table. Storm observed my Uncle with, what I thought, a curious interest, but the Judge paid no attention. He was deep in his reflection and oblivious to everything. Finally he roused himself and made his comment.

"This clears the matter up," he said. "The woman killed Marsh from the motive which she gave in her confession, and she created this false evidence against Taylor because he had abandoned her. She thereby avenged herself desperately in two directions. . . . It would be like a woman to do this, and then regret it and confess."

He then asked my Uncle if he had anything further to tell him, and although I was sure that Abner was going on to say something further when the servant entered, he replied now that he had not, and asked for the horses. The Judge went out to have the horses brought, and we remained in silence. My Uncle was calm, as with some consuming idea, but Storm was as nervous as a cat. He was out of his chair when the door was closed, and hopping about the room looking at the law books standing on the shelves in their leather covers. Suddenly he stopped and plucked out a little volume. He whipped through it with his forefinger, smothered a great oath, and shot it into his pocket, then he crooked his finger to my Uncle, and they talked together in a recess of the window until the Judge returned.

We rode away. I was sure that they intended to say something to the Judge in the woman's favor, for, guilty or not, it was a fine thing she had done to stand up and confess. But something in the interview had changed their purpose. Perhaps when they had heard the Judge's comment they saw it would be of no use. They talked closely together as they rode, but they kept before me and I could not hear. It was of the woman they spoke, however, for I caught a bit.

"But where is the motive?" said Storm.

And my Uncle answered, "In the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Kings."

We were early at the county seat, and it was a good thing for us, because the court-room was crowded to the doors. My Uncle had got a big record book out of the county clerk's office as he came in, and I was glad of it, for he gave it to me to sit on, and it raised me up so I could see. Storm was there, too, and, in fact, every man of any standing in the county.

The sheriff opened the court, the prisoners were brought in, and the Judge took his seat on the bench. He looked haggard like a man who had not slept, as, in fact, one could hardly have done who had so cruel a duty before him. Here was every hu-

man feeling pressing to save a woman, and the law to hang her. But for all his hag-ridden face, when he came to act, the man was adamant.

He ordered the confession read, and directed the girl to stand up. Taylor tried again to protest, but he was forced down into his chair. The girl stood up bravely, but she was white as plaster, and her eyes dilated. She was asked if she still adhered to the confession and understood the consequences of it, and, although she trembled from head to toe, she spoke out distinctly. There was a moment of silence and the Judge was about to speak, when another voice filled the court-room. I turned about on my book to find my head against my Uncle Abner's legs.

"I challenge the confession!" he said.

The whole court-room moved. Every eye was on the two tragic figures standing up: the slim, pale girl and the big, somber figure of my Uncle. The Judge was astounded.

"On what ground?" he said.

"On the ground," replied my Uncle, "that the confession is a lie!"

One could have heard a pin fall anywhere in the whole room. The girl caught her breath in a little gasp, and the prisoner, Taylor, half rose and then sat down as though his knees were too weak to bear him. The Judge's mouth opened, but for a moment or two he did not speak, and I could understand his amazement. Here was Abner assailing a confession which he himself had supported before the Judge, and speaking for the innocence of a woman whom he himself had shown to be guilty and taking one position privately, and another publicly. What did the man mean? And I was not surprised that the Judge's voice was stern when he spoke.

"This is irregular," he said. "It may be that this woman killed Marsh, or it may be that Taylor killed him, and there is some collusion between these persons, as you appear to suggest. And you may know something to throw light on the matter, or you may not. However that may be, this is not the time for me to hear you. You will have ample opportunity to speak when I come to try the case."

"But you will never try this case!" said Abner.

I cannot undertake to describe the desperate interest that lay on the people in the courtroom. They were breathlessly silent; one could hear the voices from the village outside, and the sounds of men and horses that came up through the open windows. No one knew what hidden thing Abner drove at. But he was a man who meant what he said, and the people knew it.

The Judge turned on him with a terrible face.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean," replied Abner, and it was in his deep, hard voice, "that you must come down from the Bench."

The Judge was in a heat of fury.

"You are in contempt," he roared. "I order your arrest. Sheriff!"

But Abner did not move. He looked the man calmly in the face.

"You threaten me," he said, "but God Almighty threatens you." And he turned about to the audience. "The authority of the law," he said, "is in the hands of the electors of this county. Will they stand up?"

I shall never forget what happened then, for I have never in my life seen anything so deliberate and impressive. Slowly, in silence, and without passion, as though they were in a church of God, men began to get up in the courtroom.

Randolph was the first. He was a justice of the peace, vain and pompous, proud of the abilities of an ancestry that he did not inherit. And his superficialities were the annoyance of my Uncle Abner's life. But whatever I may have to say of him hereafter I want to say this thing of him here, that his bigotry and his vanities were builded on the foundations of a man. He stood up as though he stood alone, with no glance about him to see what other men would do, and he faced the Judge calmly above his great black stock. And I learned then that a man may be a blusterer and a lion.

Hiram Arnold got up, and Rockford, and Armstrong, and Alkire, and Coopman, and Monroe, and Elnathan Stone, and my father, Lewis, and Dayton and Ward, and Madison from beyond the mountains. And it seemed to me that the very hills and valleys were standing up.

It was a strange and instructive thing to see. The loud-mouthed and the reckless were in that courtroom, men who would have shouted in a political convention, or run howling with a mob, but they were not the persons who stood up when Abner called upon the authority of the people to appear. Men rose whom one would not have looked to see — the blacksmith, the saddler, and old Asa Divers. And I saw that law and order and all the structure that civilization had builded up, rested on the sense of justice that certain men carried in their breasts, and that those who possessed it not, in the crisis of necessity, did not count.

Father Donovan stood up; he had a little flock beyond the valley river, and he was as poor, and almost as humble as his Master, but he was not afraid; and Bronson, who preached Calvin, and Adam Rider, who traveled a Methodist circuit. No one of them believed in what the other taught; but they all believed in justice, and when the line was drawn, there was but one side for them all.

The last man up was Nathaniel Davisson, but the reason was that he was very old, and he had to wait for his sons to help him. He had been time and again in the Assembly of Virginia, at a time when only a gentleman and landowner could sit there. He was a just man, and honorable and unafraid.

The Judge, his face purple, made a desperate effort to enforce his authority. He pounded on his desk and ordered the sheriff to clear the court-

room. But the sheriff remained standing apart. He did not lack for courage, and I think he would have faced the people if his duty had been that way. His attitude was firm, and no one could mark no uncertainty upon him, but he took no step to obey what the Judge commanded.

The Judge cried out at him in a terrible voice. "I am the representative of the law here. Go on!"

The sheriff was a plain man, and unacquainted with the nice expressions of Mr. Jefferson, but his answer could not have been better if that gentleman had written it out for him.

"I would obey the representative of the law," he said, "if I were not in the presence of the law itself!"

The Judge rose. "This is revolution," he said; "I will send to the Governor for the militia."

It was Nathaniel Davisson who spoke then. He was very old and the tremors of dissolution were on him, but his voice was steady.

"Sit down, your Honor," he said, "there is no revolution here, and you do not require troops to support your authority. We are here to support it if it ought to be lawfully enforced. But the people have elevated you to the Bench because they believed in your integrity, and if they have been mistaken they would know it." He paused, as though to collect his strength, and then went on. "The presumptions of right are all with your Honor. You administer the law upon our authority and we stand behind you. Be assured that we will not suffer our authority to be insulted in your person." His voice grew deep and resolute. "It is a grave thing to call us up against you, and not lightly, nor for a trivial reason shall any man dare to do it." Then he turned about. "Now, Abner," he said, "what is this thing?"

Young as I was, I felt that the old man spoke for the people standing in the courtroom, with their voice and their authority, and I began to fear that the measure which my Uncle had taken was high handed. But he stood there like the shadow of a great rock.

"I charge him," he said, "with the murder of Elihu Marsh! And I call upon him to vacate the Bench."

When I think about this extraordinary event now, I wonder at the calmness with which Simon Kilrail met this blow, until I reflect that he had seen it on its way, and had got ready to meet it. But even with that preparation, it took a man of iron nerve to face an assault like that and keep every muscle in its place. He had tried violence and had failed with it, and he had recourse now to the attitudes and mannerisms of a judicial dignity. He sat with his elbows on the table, and his clenched fingers propping up his jaw. He looked coldly at Abner, but he did not speak, and there was silence until Nathaniel Davisson spoke for him. His face and his voice were like iron.

"No, Abner," he said, "he shall not vacate the Bench for that, nor upon the accusation of any man. We

will have your proofs, if you please."

The Judge turned his cold face from Abner to Nathaniel Davisson, and then he looked over the men standing in the courtroom.

"I am not going to remain here," he said, "to be tried by a mob, upon the *viva voce* indictment of a bystander. You may nullify your court, if you like, and suspend the forms of law for yourselves, but you cannot nullify the constitution of Virginia, nor suspend my right as a citizen of that commonwealth.

"And now," he said, rising, "if you will kindly make way, I will vacate this courtroom, which your violence has converted into a chamber of sedition."

The man spoke in a cold, even voice, and I thought he had presented a difficulty that could not be met. How could these men before him undertake to keep the peace of this frontier, and force its lawless elements to submit to the forms of law for trial, and deny any letter of those formalities to this man? Was the grand jury, and the formal indictment, and all the right and privilege of an orderly procedure for one, and not for another?

It was Nathaniel Davisson who met this dangerous problem.

"We are not concerned," he said, "at this moment with your rights as a citizen; the rights of private citizenship are inviolate, and they remain to you, when you return to it. But you are not a private citizen. You are our agent. We have selected you to administer the law for us, and your right to act has been challenged. As the authority behind you, we appear and would know the reason."

The Judge retained his imperturbable calm.

"Do you hold me a prisoner here?" he said.

"We hold you an official in your office," replied Davisson. "Not only do we refuse to permit you to leave the courtroom, but we refuse to permit you to leave the Bench. This court shall remain as we have set it up until it is our will to readjust it. And it shall not be changed at the pleasure or demand of any man but by us only, and for a sufficient cause shown to us."

And again I was anxious for my Uncle, for I saw how grave a thing it was to interfere with the authority of the people as manifested in the forms and agencies of the law. Abner must be very sure of the ground under him.

And he was sure. He spoke now, with no introductory expressions, but directly and in the simplest words.

"These two persons," he said, indicating Taylor and the girl, "have each been willing to die in order to save the other. Neither is guilty of this crime. Taylor has kept silent, and the girl has lied, to the same end. This is the truth: There was a lovers' quarrel, and Taylor left the country precisely as he told us, except the motive, which he would not tell lest the girl be involved. And the woman, to save him, confesses to a crime that she did not commit.

"Who did commit it?" He paused and included Storm with a gesture. "We suspected this woman because Marsh had been killed by poison in his bread, and afterwards mutilated with a shot. Yesterday we rode out with the Judge to put those facts before him." Again he paused. "An incident occurring in that interview indicated that we were wrong; a second incident assured us, and still later, a third convinced us. These incidents were, first, that the Judge's watch had run down; second, that we found in his library a book with all the leaves in it uncut, except at one certain page; and, third, that we found in the county clerk's office an unindexed record in an old deed book.

"In addition to the theory of Taylor's guilt or this woman's, there was still a third; but it had only a single incident to support it, and we feared to suggest it until the others had been explained. This theory was that some one, to benefit by Marsh's death, had planned to kill him in such a manner as to throw suspicion on this woman who baked his bread, and finding Taylor gone, and the gun above the mantel, yielded to an afterthought to create a further false evidence. It was overdone!

"The trigger guard of the gun in the recoil caught in the chain of the assassin's watch and jerked it out of his pocket; he replaced the watch, but not the key which fell to the floor, and which I picked up beside the body of the dead man."

Abner turned toward the judge.

"And so," he said, "I charge Simon Kilrail with this murder; because the key winds his watch; because the record in the old deed book is a conveyance by the heirs of Marsh's lands to him at the life tenant's death; and because the book we found in his library is a book on poisons with the leaves uncut, except at the very page describing that identical poison with which Elihu Marsh was murdered."

The strained silence that followed Abner's words was broken by a voice that thundered in the courtroom. It was Randolph's.

"Come down!" he said.

And this time Nathaniel Davisson was silent.

The Judge got slowly on his feet, a resolution was forming in his face, and it advanced swiftly.

"I will give you my answer in a moment," he said.

Then he turned about and went into his room behind the Bench. There was but one door, and that opening into the court, and the people waited.

The windows were open and we could see the green fields, and the sun, and the far-off mountains, and the peace and quiet and serenity of autumn entered. The Judge did not appear. Presently there was the sound of a shot from behind the closed door. The sheriff threw it open, and upon the floor, sprawling in a smear of blood, lay Simon Kilrail, with a dueling pistol in his hand.

William J. Locke, English novelist and playwright, beloved author of so many books which represent the quintessence of romanticism, including THE BELOVED VAGABOND *and* THE MOUNTEBANK, *was born in British Guiana and educated in England and Trinidad; he traveled extensively in France before the turn of the century (perhaps the gayest time in the history of Gallic culture), and taught school in various colleges in England before devoting himself exclusively to writing the witty, altogether light-hearted books which we now associate with his name.*

One of his greatest successes was a volume of short stories titled THE JOYOUS ADVENTURES OF ARISTIDE PUJOL. *It was in this book that a delighted world first read the charming episode of the young Frenchman who taught his own language in an English girls' school, instructing his pupils in the fine points of Parisian slang and Apache argot; and it is that episode, with the curious criminous events which followed, that we now bring to you — a pre-pre-war glint of sunshine in this dark and troubled world of ours which seems to have abandoned laughing, or even chuckling, as a lost art, or worse, as something to be ashamed of. We are all too old for our years . . .*

THE ADVENTURE OF THE KIND MR. SMITH

by WILLIAM J. LOCKE

ARISTIDE PUJOL started life as a *chasseur* in a Nice café — one of those luckless children tightly encased in bottle-green cloth by means of brass buttons, who earn a sketchy livelihood by enduring with cherubic smiles the continuous maledictions of the establishment. There he soothed his hours of servitude by dreams of vast ambitions. He would become the manager of a great hotel — not a contemptible hostelry where commercial travelers and seedy Germans were indifferently bedded, but one of those white palaces where milords (English) and millionaires (American) paid a thousand francs a night for a bedroom and five louis for a glass of beer. Now, in order to derive such profit from the Anglo-Saxon, a knowledge of English was indispensable. He resolved to learn the language. How he did so, except by sheer effrontery, taking linguistic toll of frequenters of the café, would be a mystery to anyone unacquainted with Aristide. But to his friends his mastery of the English tongue in such circumstances is comprehensible. To Aristide the impossible was ever

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the one thing easy of attainment; the possible the one thing he never could achieve. That was the paradoxical nature of the man. Before his days of hunted-little-devildom were over he had acquired sufficient knowledge of English to carry him, a few years later, through various vicissitudes in England, until, fired by new social ambitions and self-educated in a haphazard way, he found himself appointed Professor of French in an academy for young ladies.

One of these days, when I can pin my dragonfly friend down to a plain, unvarnished autobiography, I may be able to trace some chronological sequence in the kaleidoscopic changes in his career. All I know of the date of the episode I am about to chronicle is that it occurred immediately after the termination of his engagement at the academy just mentioned. Somehow, Aristide's history is a category of terminations.

If the head mistress of the academy had herself played dragon at his classes, all would have gone well. He would have made his pupils conjugate irregular verbs, rendered them adepts in the mysteries of the past participle and the subjunctive mood, and turned them out quite innocent of the idiomatic quaintnesses of the French tongue. But the gods always saw wrong-headedly in the case of Aristide. A weak-minded governess — and in a governess a sense of humor and of novelty is always a sign of a weak mind — played dragon during Aristide's lessons. She appreciated his method, which was colloquial. The colloquial Aristide was jocular. His lessons therefore were a giggling joy from beginning to end. He imparted to his pupils delicious knowledge. *En avez-vous des-z-homards? Oh, les sales bêtes, elles ont du poil aux pattes*, which, being translated, is: "Have you any lobsters? Oh, the dirty animals, they have hair on their feet" — a catch phrase which, some years ago, added greatly to the gaiety of Paris, but in which I must confess to seeing no gleam of wit — became the historic property of the school. He recited to them, till they were word-perfect, a music-hall ditty of the early 'eighties — *Sur le bi, sur le banc, sur le bi du bout du banc* — and delighted them with dissertations on Mme. Yvette Guilbert's earlier repertoire. But for him they would have gone to their lives' end without knowing that *pognon* meant money; *rouspétance*, assaulting the police; *thune*, a five-franc piece; and *bouffer*, to take nourishment. He made (according to his own statement) French a living language. There was never a school in Great Britain, the Colonies, or America on which the Parisian accent was so electrically impressed. The retort, *Eh! ta sœur*, was the purest Montmartre; and the delectable locution, *Allons étrangler un perroquet* (let us strangle a parrot), employed by Apaches when inviting each other to drink a glass of absinthe, soon became current French in the school for invitations to surreptitious cocoa-parties.

The progress that academy made in a real grip of the French language was miraculous; but the knowledge it gained in French grammar and syntax was deplorable. A certain mid-term examination — the paper being set by a neighboring vicar — produced awful results. The phrase, "How do you do, dear?" which ought, by all the rules of Stratford atte-Bowe, to be translated by *Comment vous portez-vous, ma chère?* was rendered by most of the senior scholars *Eh, ma vieille, ca boulotte?* One innocent and anachronistic damsel, writing on the execution of Charles I., declared that he *cracha dans le panier* in 1649, thereby mystifying the good vicar, who was unaware that "to spit into the basket" is to be guillotined. This wealth of vocabulary was discounted by abject poverty in other branches of the language. The head mistress suspected a lack of method in the teaching of M. Pujol, and one day paid his class a surprise visit.

The sight that met her eyes petrified her. The class, including the governess, bubbled and gurgled and shrieked with laughter. M. Pujol, his bright eyes agleam with merriment and his arms moving in frantic gestures, danced about the platform. He was telling them a story — and when Aristide told a story, he told it with the eloquence of his entire frame. He bent himself double and threw out his hands.

"*Il était saoûl comme un porc*," he shouted.

And then came the hush of death. The rest of the artless tale about the man as drunk as a pig was never told. The head mistress, indignant majesty, strode up the room.

"M. Pujol, you have a strange way of giving French lessons."

"I believe, madame," said he, with a polite bow, "in interesting my pupils in their studies."

"Pupils have to be taught, not interested," said the head mistress. "Will you kindly put the class through some irregular verbs."

So for the remainder of the lesson Aristide, under the freezing eyes of the head mistress, put his sorrowful class through irregular verbs, of which his own knowledge was singularly inexact, and at the end received his dismissal. In vain he argued . . .

We find him, then, one miserable December evening, standing on the arrival platform of Euston Station (the academy was near Manchester), an unwonted statue of dubiety. At his feet lay his meagre valise; in his hand was an enormous bouquet, a useful tribute of esteem from his disconsolate pupils; around him luggage-laden porters and passengers hurried; in front were drawn up the long line of cabs, their drivers' waterproofs glistening with wet; and in his pocket rattled the few paltry coins that, for Heaven knew how long, were to keep him from starvation. Should he commit the extravagance of taking a cab or should he go forth, valise in hand, into the pouring rain?

"*Sacré mille cochons! Quel chien de climat!*" he muttered.

A smart footman standing by turned quickly and touched his hat.

"Beg pardon, sir, I'm from Mr. Smith."

"I'm glad to hear it, my friend," said Aristide.

"You're the French gentleman from Manchester?"

"Decidedly," said Aristide.

"Then, sir, Mr. Smith has sent the carriage for you."

"That's very kind of him," said Aristide.

The footman picked up the valise and darted down the platform. Aristide followed. The footman held invitingly open the door of a cosy brougham. Aristide paused for the fraction of a second. Who was this hospitable Mr. Smith?

"Bah!" said he to himself, "the best way of finding out is to go and see."

He entered the carriage, sank back luxuriously on the soft cushions, and inhaled the warm smell of leather. They started, and soon the pelting rain beat harmlessly against the windows. Aristide looked out at the streaming streets, and, hugging himself comfortably, thanked Providence and Mr. Smith. But who was Mr. Smith? But, after all, what did it matter? Mr. Smith was expecting him. He had sent the carriage for him. Evidently a well-bred and attentive person. And *tiens!* there was even a hot-water can on the floor of the brougham. "He thinks of everything, that man," said Aristide. "I feel I am going to like him."

The carriage stopped at a house in Hampstead, standing, as far as he could see in the darkness, in its own grounds. The footman opened the door for him to alight and escorted him up the front steps. A neat parlormaid received him in a comfortably-furnished hall and took his hat and greatcoat and magnificent bouquet.

"Mr. Smith hasn't come back yet from the City, sir, but Miss Christabel is in the drawing-room."

"Ah!" said Aristide. "Please give me back my bouquet."

The maid showed him into the drawing-room. A pretty girl of three-and-twenty rose from a fender-stool and advanced smilingly to meet him.

"Good afternoon, M. le Baron. I was wondering whether Thomas would spot you. I'm so glad he did. You see, neither father nor I could give him any description, for we had never seen you."

This fitted in with his theory. But why Baron? After all, why not? The English loved titles.

"He seems to be an intelligent fellow, mademoiselle."

There was a span of silence. The girl looked at the bouquet, then at Aristide, who looked at the girl, then at the bouquet, then at the girl again.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "will you deign to accept these flowers as a token of my respectful homage?"

Miss Christabel took the flowers and blushed prettily. She had dark hair and eyes and a fascinating, upturned little nose.

"An Englishman would not have thought of that," she said.

Aristide smiled in his roguish way and raised a deprecating hand.

"Oh, yes, he would. But he would not have had — what you call the cheek to do it."

Miss Christabel laughed merrily, invited him to a seat by the fire, and comforted him with tea and hot muffins. The frank charm of his girl-hostess captivated Aristide and drove from his mind the riddle of his adventure. Besides, think of the Arabian Nights' enchantment of the change from his lonely and shabby bed-sitting-room in the Rusholme Road to this fragrant palace with a princess to keep him company! He watched the firelight dancing through her hair, the dainty play of laughter over her face, and decided that the brougham had transported him to Bagdad instead of Hampstead.

"You have the air of a veritable princess," said he.

"I once met a princess — at a charity bazaar — and she was a most matter-of-fact, businesslike person."

"Bah!" said Aristide. "A princess of a charity bazaar! I was talking of the princess in a fairy tale. They are the only real ones."

"Do you know," said Miss Christabel, "that when men pay such compliments to English girls they are apt to get laughed at?"

"Englishmen, yes," replied Aristide, "because they think over a compliment for a week, so that by the time they pay it, it is addled, like a bad egg. But we of Provence pay tribute to beauty straight out of our hearts. It is true. It is sincere. And what comes out of the heart is not ridiculous."

Again the girl colored and laughed. "I've always heard that a Frenchman makes love to every woman he meets."

"Naturally," said Aristide. "If they are pretty. What else are pretty women for? Otherwise they might as well be hideous."

"Oh!" said the girl, to whom this Provençal point of view had not occurred.

"So, if I make love to you, it is but your due."

"I wonder what my fiancé would say if he heard you?"

"Your ——?"

"My fiancé! There's his photograph on the table beside you. He is six foot one, and so jealous!" she laughed again.

"The Turk!" cried Aristide, his swiftly-conceived romance crumbling into dust. Then he brightened up. "But when this six feet of muscle and egotism is absent, surely other poor mortals can glean a smile?"

"You will observe that I'm not frowning," said Miss Christabel. "But you must not call my fiancé a Turk, for he's a very charming fellow whom I hope you'll like very much."

Aristide sighed. "And the name of this thrice-blessed mortal?"

Miss Christabel told his name — Harry Ralston — and not only his name, but, such was the peculiar,

childlike charm of Aristide Pujol, also many other things about him. He was the Honorable Harry Ralston, the heir to a great brewery peerage, and very wealthy. He was a member of Parliament, and but for Parliamentary duties would have dined there that evening; but he was to come in later, as soon as he could leave the House. He also had a house in Hampshire, full of the most beautiful works of art. It was through their common hobby that her father and Harry had first made acquaintance.

"We're supposed to have a very fine collection here," she said, with a motion of her hand.

Aristide looked round the walls and saw them hung with pictures in gold frames. In those days he had not acquired an extensive culture. Besides, who having before him the firelight gleaming through Miss Christabel's hair could waste his time over painted canvas? She noted his cursory glance.

"I thought you were a connoisseur?"

"I am," said Aristide, his bright eyes fixed on her in frank admiration.

She blushed again; but this time she rose.

"I must go and dress for dinner. Perhaps you would like to be shown your room?"

He hung his head on one side.

"Have I been too bold, mademoiselle?"

"I don't know," she said. "You see, I've never met a Frenchman before."

"Then a world of undreamed-of homage is at your feet," said he.

A servant ushered him up broad, carpeted staircases into a bedroom such as he had never seen in his life before. It was all curtains and hangings and rugs and soft couches and satin quilts and dainty writing-tables and subdued lights, and a great fire glowed red and cheerful, and before it hung a clean shirt. His poor little toilet apparatus was laid on the dressing-table, and (with a tact which he did not appreciate, for he had, sad to tell, no dress-suit) the servant had spread his precious frock-coat and spare pair of trousers on the bed. On the pillow lay his night-shirt.

"Evidently," said Aristide, impressed by these preparations, "it is expected that I wash myself now and change my clothes, and that I sleep here for the night. And for all that the ravishing Miss Christabel is engaged to her honorable Harry, this is none the less a corner of Paradise."

So Aristide attired himself in his best, which included a white tie and a pair of nearly new brown boots — a long task, as he found that his valise had been spirited away and its contents, including the white tie of ceremony (he had but one), hidden in unexpected drawers and wardrobes — and eventually went downstairs into the drawing-room. There he found Miss Christabel and, warming himself on the hearthrug, a bald-headed, beefy-faced Briton, with little pig's eyes and a hearty manner, attired in a dinner-suit.

"My dear fellow," said this personage, with out-stretched hand, "I'm delighted to have you here. I've heard so much about you; and my little girl has been singing your praises."

"Mademoiselle is too kind," said Aristide.

"You must take us as you find us," said Mr. Smith. "We're just ordinary folk, but I can give you a good bottle of wine and a good cigar — it's only in England, you know, that you can get champagne fit to drink and cigars fit to smoke — and I can give you a glimpse of a modest English home. I believe you haven't a word for it in French."

"*Ma foi*, no," said Aristide, who had once or twice before heard this lunatic charge brought against his country. "In France the men all live in cafés, the children are all put out to nurse, and the women, saving the respect of mademoiselle — well, the less said about them the better."

"England is the only place, isn't it?" Mr. Smith declared, heartily. "I don't say that Paris hasn't its points. But after all — the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergères and that sort of thing soon pall, you know — soon pall."

"Yet Paris has its serious side," argued Aristide. "There is always the tomb of Napoleon."

"Papa will never take me to Paris," sighed the girl.

"You shall go there on your honeymoon," said Mr. Smith.

Dinner was announced. Aristide gave his arm to Miss Christabel, and proud not only of his partner, but also of his frock-coat, white tie, and shiny brown boots, strutted into the dining-room. The host sat at the end of the beautifully set table, his daughter on his right, Aristide on his left. The meal began gaily. The kind Mr. Smith was in the best of humors.

"And how is our dear old friend, Jules Dancourt?" he asked.

"*Tiens!*" said Aristide, to himself, "we have a dear friend Jules Dancourt. Wonderfully well," he replied at a venture, "but he suffers terribly at times from the gout."

"So do I, confound it!" said Mr. Smith, drinking sherry.

"You and the good Jules were always sympathetic," said Aristide. "Ah! he has spoken to me so often about you, the tears in his eyes."

"Men cry, my dear, in France," Mr. Smith explained. "They also kiss each other."

"*Ah, mais c'est un beau pays, mademoiselle!*" cried Aristide, and he began to talk of France and to draw pictures of his country which set the girl's eyes dancing. After that he told some of the funny little stories which had brought him disaster at the academy. Mr. Smith, with jovial magnanimity, declared that he was the first Frenchman he had ever met with a sense of humor.

"But I thought, Baron," said he, "that you lived all your life shut up in that old château of yours?"

"*Tiens!*" thought Aristide. "I am still a Baron, and I have an old château."

"Tell us about the château. Has it a fosse and a drawbridge and a Gothic chapel?" asked Miss Christabel.

"Which one do you mean?" inquired Aristide, airily. "For I have two."

When relating to me this Arabian Nights' adventure, he drew my special attention to his astuteness.

His host's eye quivered in a wink. "The one in Languedoc," said he.

Languedoc! Almost Pujol's own country! With entire lack of morality, but with picturesque imagination, Aristide plunged into a description of that non-existent baronial hall. Fosse, drawbridge, Gothic chapel were but insignificant features. It had tourelles, emblazoned gateways, bastions, donjons, barbicans; it had innumerable rooms; in the *salle des chevaliers* two hundred men-at-arms his ancestors had fed at a sitting. There was the room in which François Premier had slept, and one in which Joan of Arc had almost been assassinated. What the name of himself or of his ancestors was supposed to be, Aristide had no ghost of an idea. But as he proceeded with the erection of his airy palace, he gradually began to believe in it. He invested the place with a living atmosphere; conjured up a staff of family retainers, notably one Marie-Joseph Loufoque, the wizened old majordomo, with his long white whiskers and blue and silver livery. There were also Madeline Mioulles, the cook, and Bernadet the groom, and La Petite Fripette the goose girl. Ah! they should see La Petite Fripette! And he kept dogs and horses and cows and ducks and hens — and there was a great pond whence frogs were drawn for the consumption of the household.

Miss Christabel shivered. "I should not like to eat frogs."

"They also eat snails," said her father.

"I have a snail farm," said Aristide. "You never saw such interesting little animals. They are so intelligent. If you're kind to them they come and eat out of your hand."

"You've forgotten the pictures," said Mr. Smith.

"Ah! the pictures," cried Aristide, with a wide sweep of his arms. "Galleries full of them. Raphael, Michaelangelo, Reynolds ——"

He paused, not in order to produce the effect of a dramatic aposiopesis, but because he could not for the moment remember other names of painters.

"It is a truly historical château," said he.

"I should love to see it," said the girl.

Aristide threw out his arms across the table. "It is yours, mademoiselle, for your honeymoon," said he.

Dinner came to an end. Miss Christabel left the gentlemen to their wine, an excellent port whose English qualities were vaunted by the host. Aristide, full of food and drink and the mellow glories of the castle in Languedoc, and smoking an enormous cigar, felt at ease with all the world. He knew he should like the kind Mr.

Smith. He could stay with him for a week — or a month — why not a year?

After coffee and liqueurs had been served Mr. Smith rose and switched on a powerful electric light at the end of the large room, showing a picture on an easel covered by a curtain. He beckoned to Aristide to join him and, drawing the curtain, disclosed the picture.

"There!" said he. "Isn't it a stunner?"

It was a picture all gray skies and gray water and gray feathery trees, and a little man in the foreground wore a red cap.

"It is beautiful, but indeed it is magnificent!" cried Aristide, always impressionable to things of beauty.

"Genuine Corot, isn't it?"

"Without doubt," said Aristide.

His host poked him in the ribs. "I thought I'd astonish you. You wouldn't believe Gottschalk could have done it. There it is — as large as life and twice as natural. If you or anyone else can tell it from a genuine Corot I'll eat my hat. And all for eight pounds."

Aristide looked at the beefy face and caught a look of cunning in the little pig's eyes.

"Now are you satisfied?" asked Mr. Smith.

"More than satisfied," said Aristide, though what he was to be satisfied about passed, for the moment, his comprehension.

"If it was a copy of an existing picture, you know — one might have understood it — that, of course, would be dangerous — but for a man to go and get bits out of various Corots and stick them together like this is miraculous. If it hadn't been for a matter of business principle I'd have given the fellow eight guineas instead of pounds — hanged if I wouldn't! He deserves it."

"He does indeed," said Aristide.

"And now that you've seen it with your own eyes, what do you think you might ask me for it? I suggested something between two and three thousand — shall we say three? You're the owner, you know." Again the process of rib-digging. "Came out of that historic château of yours. My eye! you're a holy terror when you begin to talk. You almost persuaded me it was real."

"*Tiens!*" said Aristide to himself. "I don't seem to have a château after all."

"Certainly three thousand," said he, with a grave face.

"That young man thinks he knows a lot, but he doesn't," said Mr. Smith.

"Ah!" said Aristide, with singular laconicism.

"Not a blooming thing," continued his host. "But he'll pay three thousand, which is the principal, isn't it? He's partner in the show, you know, Ralston, Wiggins, and Wix's Brewery" — Aristide pricked up his ears — "and when his doddering old father dies he'll be Lord Ranelagh and come into a million of money."

"Has he seen the picture?" asked Aristide.

"Oh, yes. Regards it as a masterpiece. Didn't Brauneberger tell you of the Lancret we planted on the American?" Mr. Smith rubbed hearty hands at the memory of the iniquity. "Same old game. Always easy. I have nothing to do with the bargaining or the sale. Just an old friend of the ruined French nobleman with the historic château and family treasures. He comes along and fixes the price. I told our friend Harry ——"

"Good," thought Aristide. "This is the same Honorable Harry, M.P., who is engaged to the ravishing Miss Christabel."

"I told him," said Mr. Smith, "that it might come to three or four thousand. He jibbed a bit — so when I wrote to you I said two or three. But you might try him with three to begin with."

Aristide went back to the table and poured himself out a fresh glass of his kind host's 1865 brandy and drank it off.

"Exquisite, my dear fellow," said he. "I've none finer in my historic château."

"Don't suppose you have," grinned the host, joining him. He slapped him on the back. "Well," said he, with a shifty look in his little pig's eyes, "let us talk business. What do you think would be your fair commission? You see, all the trouble and invention have been mine. What do you say to four hundred pounds?"

"Five," said Aristide, promptly.

A sudden gleam came into the little pig's eyes.

"Done!" said Mr. Smith, who had imagined that the other would demand a thousand and was prepared to pay eight hundred.

They shook hands to seal the bargain and drank another glass of old brandy. At that moment a servant, entering, took the host aside.

"Please excuse me a moment," said he, and went out of the room.

Aristide, left alone, lighted another of his kind host's fat cigars, threw himself into a great leathern armchair by the fire, and surrendered himself deliciously to the soothing charm of the moment. Now and then he laughed, finding a certain comicality in his position. And what a charming father-in-law, this kind Mr. Smith!

His cheerful reflections were soon disturbed by the sudden irruption of his host and a grizzled, elderly, foxy-faced gentleman with a white mustache, wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honor in the buttonhole of his overcoat.

"Here, you!" cried the kind Mr. Smith, striding up to Aristide, with a very red face. "Will you have the kindness to tell me who the devil you are?"

Aristide rose, and, putting his hands behind the tails of his frock-coat, stood smiling radiantly on the hearthrug. A wit much less alert than my irresponsible friend's would have instantly appreciated the fact that the real Simon Pure had arrived on the scene.

"I, my dear friend," said he, "am the Baron de Je ne Sais Plus."

"You're a confounded impostor," spluttered Mr. Smith.

"And this gentleman here to whom I have not had the pleasure of being introduced?" asked Aristide, blandly.

"I am M. Poiron, monsieur, the agent of Messrs. Brauneberger and Compagnie, art dealers, of the Rue Notre Dame des Petits Champs of Paris," said the newcomer, with an air of defiance.

"Ah, I thought you were the Baron," said Aristide.

"There's no blooming Baron at all about it!" screamed Mr. Smith. "Are you Poiron, or is he?"

"I would not have a name like Poiron for anything in the world," said Aristide. "My name is Aristide Pujol, soldier of fortune, at your service."

"How the blazes did you get here?"

"Your servant asked me if I was a French gentleman from Manchester. I was. He said that Mr. Smith had sent his carriage for me. I thought it hospitable of the kind Mr. Smith. I entered the carriage — *et voilà!*"

"Then clear out of here this very minute," said Mr. Smith, reaching forward his hand to the bell-push.

Aristide checked his impulsive action.

"Pardon me, dear host," said he. "It is raining dogs and cats outside. I am very comfortable in your luxurious home. I am here, and here I stay."

"I'm shot if you do," said the kind Mr. Smith, his face growing redder and uglier. "Now, will you go out, or will you be thrown out?"

Aristide, who had no desire whatever to be ejected from this snug nest into the welter of the wet and friendless world, puffed at his cigar, and looked at his host with the irresistible drollery of his eyes.

"You forget, *mon cher ami*," said he, "that neither the beautiful Miss Christabel nor her affianced, the Honorable Harry, M.P., would care to know that the talented Gottschalk got only eight pounds, not even guineas, for painting that three-thousand-pound picture."

"So it's blackmail, eh?"

"Precisely," said Aristide, "and I don't blush at it."

"You infernal little blackguard!"

"I seem to be in congenial company," said Aristide. "I don't think our friend M. Poiron has more scruples than he has right to the ribbon of the Legion of Honor which he is wearing."

"How much will you take to go out? I have a check-book handy."

Mr. Smith moved a few steps from the hearthrug. Aristide sat down in the armchair. An engaging, fantastic impudence was one of the charms of Aristide Pujol.

"I'll take five hundred pounds," said he, "to stay in."

"Stay in?" Mr. Smith grew apoplectic.

"Yes," said Aristide. "You can't do without me. Your daughter and your servants know me as M. le Baron — by the way, what is my name? And where is my historic château in Languedoc?"

"Mireilles," said M. Poiron, who was sitting grim and taciturn on one of the dining-room chairs. "And the place is the same, near Montpellier."

"I like to meet an intelligent man," said Aristide.

"I should like to wring your infernal neck," said the kind Mr. Smith. "But, by George, if we do let you in you'll have to sign me a receipt implicating yourself up to the hilt. I'm not going to be put into the cart by you, you can bet your life."

"Anything you like," said Aristide, "so long as we all swing together."

Now, when Aristide Pujol arrived at this point in his narrative I, his chronicler, who am nothing if not an eminently respectable, law-abiding Briton, took him warmly to task for his sheer absence of moral sense. His eyes, as they sometimes did, assumed a luminous pathos.

"My dear friend," said he, "have you ever faced the world in a foreign country in December with no character and fifteen pounds five-and-threepence in your pocket? Five hundred pounds was a fortune. It is one now. And to be gained just by lending oneself to a good farce, which didn't hurt anybody. You and your British morals! Bah!" said he, with a fine flourish.

Aristide, after much parleying, was finally admitted into the nefarious brotherhood. He was to retain his rank as the Baron de Mireilles, and play the part of the pecuniarily inconvenienced nobleman forced to sell some of his rare collection. Mr. Smith had heard of the Corot through their dear old common friend, Jules Dancourt of Rheims, had mentioned it alluringly to the Honorable Harry, had arranged for the Baron, who was visiting England, to bring it over and dispatch it to Mr. Smith's house, and on his return from Manchester to pay a visit to Mr. Smith, so that he could meet the Honorable Harry in person. In whatever transaction ensued Mr. Smith, so far as his prospective son-in-law was concerned, was to be the purely disinterested friend. It was Aristide's wit which invented a part for the supplanted M. Poiron. He should be the eminent Parisian expert who, chancing to be in London, had been telephoned for by the kind Mr. Smith.

"It would not be wise for M. Poiron," said Aristide, chuckling inwardly with puckish glee, "to stay here for the night — or for two or three days — or a week — like myself. He must go back to his hotel when the business is concluded."

"*Mais, pardon!*" cried M. Poiron, who had been formally invited, and had arrived late solely because he had missed his train at Manchester, and come on by the next one. "I cannot go out into the wet, and I have no hotel to go to."

Aristide appealed to his host. "But he is unreasonable, *cher ami*. He must play his *rôle*. M. Poiron has been telephoned for. He can't possibly stay here. Surely five hundred pounds

is worth one little night of discomfort? And there are a legion of hotels in London."

"Five hundred pounds!" exclaimed M. Poiron. "*Qu'est-ce que vous chantez là?* I want more than five hundred pounds."

"Then you're jolly well not going to get it," cried Mr. Smith, in a rage. "And as for you"— he turned on Aristide —"I'll wring your infernal neck yet."

"Calm yourself, calm yourself!" smiled Aristide, who was enjoying himself hugely.

At this moment the door opened and Miss Christabel appeared. On seeing the decorated stranger she started with a little "Oh!" of surprise.

"I beg your pardon."

Mr. Smith's angry face wreathed itself in smiles.

"This, my darling, is M. Poiron, the eminent Paris expert, who has been good enough to come and give us his opinion on the picture."

M. Poiron bowed. Aristide advanced.

"Mademoiselle, your appearance is like a mirage in a desert."

She smiled indulgently and turned to her father. "I've been wondering what had become of you. Harry has been here for the last half-hour."

"Bring him in, dear child, bring him in!" said Mr. Smith, with all the heartiness of the fine old English gentleman. "Our good friends are dying to meet him."

The girl flickered out of the room like a sunbeam (the phrase is Aristide's), and the three precious rascals put their heads together in a hurried and earnest colloquy. Presently Miss Christabel returned, and with her came the Honorable Harry Ralston, a tall, soldierly fellow, with close-cropped fair curly hair and a fair mustache, and frank blue eyes that, even in Parliament, had seen no harm in his fellow-creatures. Aristide's magical vision caught him wincing ever so little at Mr. Smith's effusive greeting and overdone introductions. He shook Aristide warmly by the hand.

"You have a beauty there, Baron, a perfect beauty," said he, with the insane ingenuousness of youth. "I wonder how you can manage to part with it."

"*Ma foi*," said Aristide, with his back against the end of the dining-table and gazing at the masterpiece. "I have so many at the Château de Mireilles. When one begins to collect, you know — and when one's grandfather and father have had also the divine mania ——"

"You were saying, M. le Baron," said M. Poiron of Paris, "that your respected grandfather bought this direct from Corot himself."

"A commission," said Aristide. "My grandfather was a patron of Corot."

"Do you like it, dear?" asked the Honorable Harry.

"Oh, yes!" replied the girl, fervently. "It is beautiful. I feel like Harry about it." She turned to Aristide. "How can you part with it?

Were you really in earnest when you said you would like me to come and see your collection?"

"For me," said Aristide, "it would be a visit of enchantment."

"You must take me, then," she whispered to Harry. "The Baron has been telling us about his lovely old château."

"Will you come, monsieur?" asked Aristide.

"Since I'm going to rob you of your picture," said the young man, with smiling courtesy, "the least I can do is to pay you a visit of apology. Lovely!" said he, going up to the Corot.

Aristide took Miss Christabel, now more bewitching than ever with the glow of young love in her eyes and a flush on her cheek, a step or two aside and whispered:

"But he is charming, your fiancé! He almost deserves his good fortune."

"Why almost?" she laughed, shyly.

"It is not a man, but a demi-god, that would deserve you."

M. Poiron's harsh voice broke out.

"You see, it is painted in the beginning of Corot's later manner — it is 1864. There is the mystery which, when he was quite an old man, became a trick. If you were to put it up to auction at Christie's it would fetch, I am sure, five thousand pounds."

"That's more than I can afford to give," said the young man, with a laugh. "Mr. Smith mentioned something between three and four thousand pounds. I don't think I can go above three."

"I have nothing to do with it, my dear boy, nothing whatever," said Mr. Smith, rubbing his hands. "You wanted a Corot. I said I thought I could put you on to one. It's for the Baron here to mention his price. I retire now and forever."

"Well, Baron?" said the young man, cheerfully. "What's your idea?"

Aristide came forward and resumed his place at the end of the table. The picture was in front of him beneath the strong electric light; on his left stood Mr. Smith and Poiron, on his right Miss Christabel and the Honorable Harry.

"I'll not take three thousand pounds for it," said Aristide. "A picture like that! Never!"

"I assure you it would be a fair price," said Poiron.

"You mentioned that figure yourself only just now," said Mr. Smith, with an ugly glitter in his little eyes.

"I presume, gentlemen," said Aristide, "that this picture is my own property." He turned engagingly to his host. "Is it not, *cher ami?*"

"Of course it is."

"And you, M. Poiron, acknowledge formally that it is mine?" he asked.

"*Sans aucun doute.*"

"*Eh bien,*" said Aristide, throwing open his arms and gazing round sweetly. "I have changed my mind. I do not sell the picture at all."

"Not sell it? What the — what do you mean?" asked Mr. Smith, striving to mellow the gathering thunder on his brow.

"I do not sell," said Aristide.

"Listen, my dear friends!" He was in the seventh heaven of happiness — the principal man, the star, taking the centre of the stage. "I have an announcement to make to you. I have fallen desperately in love with mademoiselle."

There was a general gasp. Mr. Smith looked at him, red-faced and open-mouthed. Miss Christabel blushed furiously and emitted a sound half between a laugh and a scream. Harry Ralston's eyes flashed.

"My dear sir ——" he began.

"Pardon," said Aristide, disarming him with the merry splendor of his glance. "I do not wish to take mademoiselle from you. My love is hopeless! I know it. But it will feed me to my dying day. In return for the joy of this hopeless passion I will not sell you the picture — I give it to you as a wedding present."

He stood, with the air of a hero, both arms extended.

"I give it to you," said he. "It is mine. I have no wish but for your happiness. In my Château de Mireilles there are a hundred others."

"This is madness!" said Mr. Smith, bursting with suppressed indignation.

"My dear fellow!" said Mr. Harry Ralston. "It is unheard-of generosity on your part. But we can't accept it."

"Then," said Aristide, advancing dramatically to the picture, "I take it under my arm, I put it in a hansom cab, and I go with it to Languedoc."

Mr. Smith caught him by the wrist and dragged him out of the room.

"You little brute! Do you want your neck broken?"

"Do you want the marriage of your daughter with the rich and Honorable Harry broken?" asked Aristide.

Mr. Smith stamped about helplessly, half weeping. Aristide entered the dining-room and beamed.

"The kind Mr. Smith has consented. Mr. Honorable Harry and Miss Christabel, there is your Corot. And now, may I be permitted?" He rang the bell. A servant appeared.

"Some champagne to drink to the health of the fiancés," he cried.

Mr. Smith looked at him almost admiringly. "By Jove!" he muttered. "You *have* got a nerve."

"*Voilà!*" said Aristide, when he had finished the story.

"And did they accept the Corot?" I asked.

"Of course. It is hanging now in the big house in Hampshire. I stayed with the kind Mr. Smith for six weeks," he added, doubling himself up in his chair and hugging himself with mirth, "and we became very good friends. And I was at the wedding."

"And what about their honeymoon visit to Languedoc?"

"Alas!" said Aristide. "The morning before the wedding I had a telegram — it was from my old father at Aigues-Mortes — to tell me that the historic Château de Mireilles, with my priceless collection of pictures, had been burned to the ground."

"Like — but oh how different!"

Continuing our discussion of detective stories which have similar or identical titles . . . Compare the titles in the following group, selected almost at random: no pair is identical, yet the resemblances are too marked to be missed. Let's start with an example from our own work: DRURY LANE'S LAST CASE *is surely the titular descendant of E. C. Bentley's* TRENT'S LAST CASE. *Anthony Berkeley's* TRIAL AND ERROR *is similarly the forefather of Lawrence Treat's* TRIAL AND TERROR. *H. F. Heard's* A TASTE FOR HONEY *brings to mind the later title, Matthew Head's* THE SMELL OF MONEY — *and isn't it a curious coincidence that even the names of the authors are so alike, Heard and Head? There can be no doubt that Rufus King and Lawrence G. Blochman were thinking along similar larcenous lines when they titled two of their books respectively* DIAGNOSIS: MURDER *and* DIAGNOSIS: HOMICIDE; *however, this is one of the most understandable instances of detectival duplication: the sleuths in both volumes are doctors — Dr. Colin Starr and Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee — and both have a genius for diagnosing the most irrevocable of crimes.*

We can honestly testify that the Ellery Queen title, TEN DAYS' WONDER, *derived from Shakespeare's "King Henry VI," but we cannot deny that in the back of our brain was the consciousness that A. A. Milne had called one of his detective novels* FOUR DAYS' WONDER. *And when we ourselves titled Roy Vickers's book* THE DEPARTMENT OF DEAD ENDS, *we believed it to be the perfect, inevitable, and natural title; yet we were similarly aware, in the back of our memory, that Carter Dickson had previously called one of his books, with equal perfection, inevitability, and naturalness,* THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS.

Word-for-word duplications of title, rather than basic similarities, are also common — and unavoidable. Charles Dickens called his finest detective short story "Hunted Down"; nearly twenty years later James M'Govan titled one of his books HUNTED DOWN, *and we have no idea how many times the same title must have been thought of and actually used since. We called one of our novels* THE DEVIL TO PAY, *and a year later Dorothy L. Sayers titled one of her dramas with the identical four words. Similarly, Ellery Queen's* THE DRAGON'S TEETH *turned up three years later as the title of Upton Sinclair's third Lanny Budd book. Luckily for all of us, a title* per se *cannot be copyrighted — imagine the world-wide confusion that would result if this wise provision of the law were ever changed: why, a writer might have to spend more time checking and rechecking his title, to make sure he was not violating a prior use, than he spent writing the book itself!*

Which brings us to Mary Roberts Rinehart's "The Papered Door." So

far as we know, this is a unique title, although Mrs. Rinehart herself later used, for a detective novel, the shortened version of THE DOOR. *But "The Papered Door" has so specific a genesis that it is unlikely any other American writer ever even thought of it as a possible title. Mrs. Rinehart spent a year in Vienna not too long before she wrote the earliest version of "The Papered Door," and in Vienna she learned that it is, or was at that time, a European custom to paper over a door. That curious fact undoubtedly led, as curious facts will, not only to the basic plot idea of the story but to the title as well.*

But Mrs. Rinehart too has duplicated a title — as, we repeat, most of us have. Mrs. Rinehart's THE YELLOW ROOM, *which appeared in 1945, is a shorter version of the title of one of the most famous detective novels — Gaston Leroux's* THE MYSTERY OF THE YELLOW ROOM, *first published in the United States in 1908. The overwhelming probability is that Mrs. Rinehart has never even connected the two titles in her mind, or even dreamed of their similarity — until this very moment, when (we hope) she is reading these words!*

THE PAPERED DOOR

by MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

THE small frame house was drafty. Air currents moved the curtains at the windows and billowed the cheap rug on the floor. The baby had the croup, and this had given her an excuse for being up, for the roaring fire in the kitchen stove, and for the lighted lamp.

Early in the evening she had sent over to the doctor's for medicine. The drug store was closed and a curious crowd had gathered in front of it. The doctor dispensed his own prescriptions and had sent back with the bottle a kindly note:

"Dear Molly, if we can do anything, let us know. Would you like Ann to spend the night with you?"

But she had not wanted Ann. Her eight-year-old girl had gone back with a message that she thought she could manage nicely. The thought of Ann's prying eyes made her shudder.

Then the quiet night had settled down on them. Sometime after eleven, moving about the overheated room, she had paused and glanced out of the window. The kitchen was in an ell and so she could see across the street. There was someone standing still there; a shadow, and what seemed to be the end of a lighted cigar.

She knew then that the house was being watched.

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She dropped the curtain and stood still. Queer memories came to her: the day they had moved into the house, and Jim papering the kitchen. They had lighted a great fire, like this one, to dry the paste. She would spread the paste on the paper, and Jim would take it from her. He had laughed over that job; it had seemed like play to him.

By one o'clock, the baby upstairs was breathing easier, and the eight-year-old girl was asleep in her bed, her arms over her head. Molly stood in the doorway, looking at them. Why were there children? They were born only to suffer. Girls especially. But the baby would have his troubles too. Boys grew into men, and were liable to the temptations of men. Violent horrible things happened, because they were men.

She went downstairs again. It was as though she could not stay in any one place. Except for the kitchen the house was very cold, and she picked up a shawl and threw it around her. Outside snow had commenced to fall. It beat against the thin walls and the window panes like fine hard sand.

She shivered in the bleak little hall, but in the kitchen the heat was terrific. After a moment she raised the window, and the man across the street, now powdered with fine snow, saw her and came over.

"How's the baby?" he asked.

She could see him now. The lamplight streamed out into the empty street, and she recognized him. It was Tom Cooper, one of the county detectives. She knew him well, but now he was a stranger to her; a stranger and an enemy.

"He's asleep."

"That's good."

He stood there awkwardly. For some reason he had taken off his hat, and that alarmed her. He was already showing her the deference of bereavement. She drew herself up, a thin angular figure against the lamp light.

"I got some medicine from the doctor. It's helped him."

"Fine." He seemed at a loss for words. "You'd better go to bed," he said at last. "There's no use the two of us staying up. I guess he won't come back while I'm hanging around."

"No," she replied wearily, "he won't come back, Mr. Cooper. That was the last word he said."

The detective coughed, cleared his throat, spat.

"We are all mighty sorry," he observed, using a carefully conversational tone. "These things happen now and then."

"Yes."

"He must have been drinking."

"Maybe. I don't know."

The conversation languished, and she made a move to lower the window. But some instinct of pity, or perhaps something even more significant, caused her to pause.

"I expect you're right cold out there."

"Well, I am not warm," he replied cheerfully. "I am burning up considerable fuel but it doesn't seem to heat much." To show his ease he

lighted a fresh stogie. The match flare showed his good-humored face, drawn and strained in spite of his tone.

"You wouldn't care to come in and warm your feet, would you?"

He hesitated. The village street was quiet. Owing to its semi-isolated position, he had commanded all approaches to the house from his vantage point across the street. Once inside — But then again, the house was small and lightly built; one could hear a footfall through it. A man ought to be allowed to thaw out now and then.

"I don't know but I will for a minute or two, Molly," he assented, "if you'll unlock the door."

But it was not the kitchen door which she unlocked. He could hear her making her way to the front of the house, and when she admitted him it was to the bare shabby parlor.

"I'd just as soon sit in the kitchen."

But she appeared not to hear him. She knelt in front of the polished stove and put a match to the wood laid ready. He eyed her as she knelt there. She was a pretty, slender woman, still in her early thirties; a delicate sensitive type, oddly out of place among the buxom village women. She had never mixed successfully with them, he knew. They had been suspicious of her gentility, of the books on her table — she had been a schoolteacher — of her shy aloofness. After their manner they had predicted calamity as a result of that marriage; and the detective, shaking himself out of his coat, knew that now it had come. Only it was not calamity: it was sheer stark tragedy.

He would have protected her if he could. He had always felt a tenderness for her. Her shyness had drawn him. He liked aloof women. But there was no protection for her now, and perhaps he realized a certain strength in her, a fine-drawn endurance. He looked up at her as he drew his chair to the fire and warmed his half-frozen fingers.

"Just what do you know about it, Molly?"

"Very little, except that it was over that girl."

"You say he hadn't been drinking?"

"Not that I know of. But he'd been ugly all morning. When he started out I begged him to leave his gun with me, but he took it."

There was a silence between them. After a moment she went out to the kitchen again, under pretense of listening for the baby, and put some more coal on the kitchen fire. She stopped long enough to look at one particular portion of the wall, and this she did stealthily, after a glance toward the front of the house. What she saw seemed to satisfy her, for she went back to the parlor again.

"I guess I've only got myself to blame," she said, picking up the conversation where it had left off, and still with that curious casualness of manner. "She's a pretty girl, that girl at Heideger's, and Jim's sociable. Lately, with the baby and the house,

I haven't had much time for Jim. I was tired at night, and so — Jim's been hanging around her for quite a while."

Cooper nodded. "So he took the gun and went out, eh?"

"Not just like that. He often carried a gun. You know, since that hold-up at the plant ——"

"And then what?"

"I don't know very much. From what I gather, because with everybody talking all at once I got kind of mixed up, it seems that the clerk from the drug store walked into Heideger's while Jim was there, and asked the girl what she meant by fooling around with a married man. Then he told Jim to come home because his baby was sick. I'd sent over this afternoon for some medicine. That was the start. The trouble came then."

"And after the trouble Jim came home," the detective prompted, "and then what, Molly?"

"Then Jim came home," she repeated in her level voice, "and said he was in trouble and he would have to leave town. I gave him all the money I had and got his winter overcoat out. It smelled of moth-balls, but there wasn't time to air it. He put it on and went."

The detective sniffed.

"Moth-balls!" he said. "That's what I've been smelling. You must have spilled them around."

The hands which still held the shawl about her closed convulsively, but her face was quiet.

"I suppose so."

"He didn't say what the trouble was?"

"No. I didn't ask him. I never thought of a shooting. I thought it was the girl."

She was utterly impersonal. He had some faint glimmering, as he sat there, of how life had betrayed her, trapped her and betrayed her. And in the silence he could hear, through the flimsy floor, the baby's croupy cough overhead.

"I suppose men are just naturally unfaithful," she said, when the coughing had ceased.

"Not all men, Molly. This girl, she just got around Jim."

"She was pretty," she agreed, as though that answered all questions. "And I guess they'll say in this town that I drove him to her. A man likes a woman to be gay and cheerful. But the baby's been delicate, and I tire kind of easy these days."

For a few moments there was silence in the parlor, save for the creak of the self-rocker in which the detective gently swung himself. He yawned and stretched out his legs.

"You don't mind if I smoke in here?"

"Jim smoked all over the house. Is the drug clerk badly hurt?"

The creaking of the self-rocker stopped. The detective looked hard at his stogie. "Yes, he's pretty bad," he said after a moment. "He's — well, Molly, you will learn it soon enough anyhow. He's dead."

For the first time her self-possession left her. She dropped down limply on

one of the plush chairs, and sat turning her wedding ring on her finger.

"Jim didn't say that," she whispered.

"I'm sorry, Molly. He died right off."

"Then it's murder?"

"I'm afraid so."

Out of delicacy he did not glance at her. There was a furtive look about her just then; a recklessness, too. But the detective was busy with his own thoughts. When at last he glanced at her, her face was as quiet as ever.

"Funny!" he said. "That moth stuff seems stronger than ever!"

"I don't like it. It gives me a headache."

Suddenly he turned to her and put a hand over hers.

"Listen to me, girl," he said. "Don't take this thing too hard. Something of this sort was bound to come sooner or later. If he gets away, you are better without him. If he doesn't ——" He threw out his hands. "He has never supported you. You have worked for him, haven't you, and borne his children? What have you had out of it? Try to be sensible. Things are pretty bad just now, but they have been pretty bad for you for the last eight years. It's been drink and gambling and other women, and I am going to tell you the whole thing straight. There is no use cutting off a dog's tail an inch at a time. He shot the girl, too. They are both dead. The sheriff is out with a posse, and there is a thousand dollars on his head. Heideger's offering it."

She sat back, with her eyes closed. But she was not faint. She was thinking. Both of them; Jim had killed them both. Then the girl from Heideger's was gone. She was dead. She would never again come between herself and Jim. Cooper was swaying unhappily in his chair, and the creaking of the springs said to her quite plainly: *Dead, dead, dead* . . .

"Two of them!" she said at last. "Two of them. Oh, my God." But she caught herself up quickly, resumed that strange monotonous casualness of hers. "The drug clerk was a nice young man. I forget his name, but we used to talk about books . . ."

The detective looked at her sharply. She made him uneasy. Finally, he eased himself out of his chair.

"Well, I'd better be going," he said awkwardly. "I feel a lot better. I suppose there isn't anything I can do?"

"I'm all right. The doctor gave the baby something to make him sleep. I guess he thought I needed some rest."

Cooper threw the end of his stogie into the stove, drew a revolver from his coat pocket and glanced at it, remembered suddenly that the action was hardly delicate, and thrust it back.

"I suppose he's hardly likely to come back here? There's no reason that you know of, to bring him back?"

"He's not likely to risk his neck to see me again. Or his children," she added, with almost the first bitterness she had shown. But the next moment she was calm again.

"I was thinking," she suggested, "that if I leave the latch off you could come in now and then and get warm. I can leave a cup of tea on the stove. Do you want milk in it?"

"Sugar, thank you, and no milk," he said. "You were always a thoughtful woman, Molly." There was something almost wistful in his voice. Mindful of the sleeping baby, he closed the door cautiously behind him as he went out.

She stood inside, listening to his feet on the frozen ground outside. Then she went back into the parlor, and from behind the plush sofa retrieved a man's heavy overcoat, redolent of moth preventives. This she carried upstairs and placed carefully behind the baby's crib, and then, closing the door into that room, she went into the kitchen again.

So the girl at Heideger's hotel was dead . . .

Never again would she flirt with the traveling men at the hotel, passing them with her bold eyes and swaying hips. And never again would she lure Jim with that insolent young body of hers. She felt no pity, but a hard sense of relief. It was as though, now the girl was gone, she could think once more, could plan, even calculate.

The posse was out in the hills after Jim. Following the tragedy he had gone back to the house, hitched the team to the buckboard, and driven furiously out of town. But she knew what the posse did not; that the wagon was in a field some miles out with a broken wheel, and that Jim Carter was not in the hills.

In the kitchen she moved about methodically, built up the fire again, put on the tea-kettle. She was not tired now. She felt strong, capable of anything. There was method now in her movements, in the deliberation with which at last she approached that portion of the wall where the paper still showed faintly damp. She lowered her voice.

"Are you all right, Jim?"

"For God's sake put out that fire, I'm stifling."

"I've got to dry this paper. And anyhow I'm boiling the kettle. Cooper's coming in again for some tea."

She could hear him muttering his disgust and anger from beyond the wall, but she paid no attention.

His hiding place was well conceived, for the night at least. Beside the range there had been a small unlighted closet, with a flat wooden door which fitted close without a frame. Long ago the door had been papered to match the kitchen. It had been the work of only a few moments to take off the lock. After that he had gone inside and drawn the door to behind him, shutting out from her sight his shaking hands and death-colored face. Then, neatly and with dispatch, she had repapered that portion of the wall. The door had disappeared.

Now the paste was almost dry. Let them find the wagon and search the house. For tonight at least Jim was safe. Jim was safe, and the girl from Heideger's was dead.

Her voice was more gentle when she went back to the wall again.

"Maybe if you drilled another hole ——" she asked.

"I've drilled a dozen. It's the heat. I'm up against the chimney. What did Cooper say?"

"It's bad news, Jim."

"He's dead?"

"Yes."

She hesitated. He did not know about the girl. Perhaps he did not even know that he had shot her. He had emptied the revolver at the man and then fled, out the back door of the small frame hotel.

She opened her mouth to speak, shut it again. He would know soon enough. As she listened she could hear the soft grinding of the drill stop for a moment, then go on. What was he thinking about in there, fighting for very air to breathe? Was there any grief in him, any remorse? Was he wondering about the girl, afraid to ask her?

But when the sulky voice spoke again it was to tell her to go out and see if the sawdust outside could be seen.

"If they find that wagon they'll be back."

"No, if I go out Cooper will see me."

She made the tea, crossing and recrossing the little room cautiously. When she came back from placing the cup on the fender of the parlor stove, the querulous voice was speaking from the other side of the partition. "What the devil do you mean by bringing Tom Cooper in here anyhow? He'd sell me out for a plugged nickel."

"As long as he can come and go he'll be sure I've nothing to hide. Listen, Jim. Can you hear me plainly?"

"Yes."

"The doctor sent some sleeping stuff for the baby. Do you suppose Cooper would notice it in a cup of tea?"

"I don't know. You could try it."

"If he would drop off, you know, you might get away yet. On the milk train. They wouldn't be looking for you there."

"I might. If I could get out of this hole ——"

The sound of the drill had ceased.

"And if you did, and got settled somewhere, you'd send for us, Jim, wouldn't you? You'd owe us that, wouldn't you?"

"Sure I'd send for you, Molly. You and the kids."

She listened to that facile promise of his; it did not ring true, and she knew it. She had listened to his promises before. But this time, she told herself, things were different. He had had his lesson. Surely now, in some quiet place ——

"If I could get to the barn, I could crawl along Shultz's fence to the sidetrack, Molly."

"You'll get there," she promised him.

It was some little time later that she realized that the snow was coming down steadily, and she began to

watch it. If it kept on, it would help him, would cover his tracks. It meant life to him, that snow. But if it stopped ——

She did not tell Jim that it was snowing. From behind the papered door he was muttering complaints; of the heat, of his cramped position, of the lack of air.

"I'm suffocating in here!"

"For God's sake, Jim, be still. He may come in any minute."

"What's he coming for? He's always been hanging around you."

That roused her to sharp anger.

"He may be coming because there's a thousand dollar reward for you."

She heard him swearing violently, and then — the wall was paper-thin — she heard him sliding cautiously about in that narrow space.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm trying to sit down on the floor. I'm all in, and I'll need my strength."

"Listen, Jim," she said desperately. "Don't go to sleep, will you?"

"God in heaven, do you suppose I'm sleeping tonight?"

"If you hear me cutting the paper just keep quiet. I'll rap three times first, to let you know. Be still! There's someone outside!"

She stood, rigid with terror, but the newcomer turned out to be Mrs. Shultz, from the house next door. She opened the kitchen door and stepped in, her small black eyes blazing with curiosity.

"I thought I heard you talking to someone?"

"The children are wakeful. I was calling up to them."

Mrs. Shultz shook the snow from her shawl, and went to the stove.

"It didn't seem neighborly, me being comfortable in bed and you here in trouble," she said, gazing about the room. "I seen your lamp going, so I told Shultz I was coming over. I see they've got somebody watching the place."

"Tom Cooper." Molly's voice was as casual as ever. Mrs. Shultz looked at her with cold unfriendliness.

"I'm glad you're taking it so calm. But I guess Jim's been a good bit of worry, from first to last."

"It wouldn't do me any good to scream."

Mrs. Shultz nodded in agreement. Suddenly she felt an enormous importance, alone in this house of tragedy, with this desolated woman. She could hear herself the next day, and for days and months and years to come: "Yes, I stayed with her that night. She looked terrible, but she was quiet enough. She never had any real feelings anyhow. It was snowing hard, and the police were all about the place. They knew he'd come sneaking back, the dirty murderer."

"I'm going to stay with you," she offered. "I can lay down on the parlor sofa. I guess you don't mind."

But Molly met this coldly and firmly.

"I'm afraid I would mind," she said quietly. "This is a very sad night for me. I should like to be alone."

"Just like that," Mrs. Shultz said

afterwards. "She as good as put me out. And the way Shultz carried on when he had to come down in his night-shirt and let me in!"

The kettle had boiled long since. Now she made the tea, and going carefully upstairs into the children's room, she got a bottle from the oak bureau and the overcoat from behind the crib. She worked her way carefully down the stairs, her eyes fixed on the front door, and a moment later she was speaking through the wall.

"I've put your overcoat behind the woodpile on the back porch, Jim. Your cap's in the pocket."

But there was no answer. Only, from behind the flimsy partition, the faint sounds of deep regular breathing.

She made a small despairing gesture and went back to the table, where the bottle and an empty tea cup stood. *Two drops in a little water. Repeat if necessary in three hours.* It was powerful, that bottle. It held sleep for a child, and maybe life for a man. She poured a full half of its contents into the cup, and then hid the bottle inside the clock.

When she had made the tea she sipped it. It tasted slightly bitter, but if it was very hot —— It was not so bad when she had added the sugar. She stood there, tasting it from a spoon.

After that she cut some bread and spread it, and with plate and cup in her hand she went to the front door and called softly across through the snow.

"Your tea's ready whenever you want it."

Cooper started across the street. Behind her the kitchen clock struck, with a thin metallic ring. It was a very old clock. It had marked in its time birth and death and the giving in marriage. When the door was opened to wind it and to set its spindling hands, the inside of the case smelled of generations of wood fires.

Cooper heard it and smiled at her.

"Only twelve o'clock! Seems like I've been standing out there a thousand years."

His plain good-humored face reproached her. She had always liked him, and she knew — as women do know — of that weakness of his for her. Now she was playing him a dirty trick. It would hurt him, damage him. The hand which held the plate, with the cup resting on it, shook somewhat. And he was keen enough. He noticed that, and he looked at her, confronting her squarely.

"What's the matter, Molly?"

"What isn't the matter?"

"See here, you're playing square with me, aren't you? Jim's not here, is he?"

"The house has been searched once. You can do it again if you like."

That appeared to satisfy him. He drank his tea standing, however, and ate some of the bread, and when he had finished, although he agreed to come back and "sit awhile," he made a final round, passing through the kitchen, where now the paper was dry over the door, and so outside.

It was a bad night. The gale was increasing, driving the snow before it like small sharp missiles. It caught his hat and sent him running and muttering after it. When he came back, Molly was on the kitchen porch, the wind whistling about her thin body.

"Get in there," he said, almost roughly. "Do you want to catch your death?"

He went back to the parlor. It was very warm now, and he turned up the lamp and took off his overcoat. The baby had roused and was whimpering, and Molly had gone upstairs to him.

Cooper called up to her to stay there; to go to bed and get some sleep, and she promised. Down below she heard him noisily yawning, heard him pull his chair closer to the stove, and then a long silence.

Molly stood listening at the top of the stairs. There was no movement below and she came down stealthily, carrying the baby's milk bottle as an excuse.

Cooper was sound asleep in the parlor, his head dropped forward on his breast. There was a strong odor of drying wool as his overcoat steamed by the fire.

Still holding the bottle, she crept to the kitchen and tapped lightly three times on the papered door. There was no reply. Her heart almost stopped, leaped on again, raced wildly. She repeated the signal. Then, desperately, she put her lips to the wall.

"Jim!" she whispered.

There was absolute silence, save for the heavy breathing of the detective in the parlor. Madness seized her. She crept along the narrow passage to the parlor door, and working with infinite caution, in spite of her frenzy, she closed it and locked it. Then back to the kitchen again, pulses hammering.

The bottle fell off the table and broke with a crash. For a moment she felt as if something in her had given way also. But there came no outcry from the parlor, no heavy weight against the flimsy door.

She got a knife from the table drawer and cut relentlessly through the new paper strips. Then, with the edge of the blade, she worked the door open. Jim was lying at the bottom of the closet, where the air hardly penetrated. His face was a purple-red, and his mouth was open and relaxed.

Now she worked in a frenzy. Upstairs the baby had started again; evidently the medicine had ceased to operate. If Cooper heard the child and wakened, everything was over.

She did all the senseless things that women do at such times; rubbed Jim's wrist to restore his pulse, talked to him, tried to drag him out. And in the end the cooler air revived him. He opened his bloodshot eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked thickly.

"Don't talk, Jim. You know what's wrong. You're trying to get away. Lie still till you get your strength back."

"Away?"

"Don't try to talk, Jim. Can you

hear me? Do you understand what I say?"

He nodded.

"Cooper is locked in the parlor, asleep. You can get away now. My God, don't close your eyes again. Listen! You can get away."

"Away from what?" he asked stupidly.

"From the police. Try to remember, Jim. You shot the clerk from the drug store and — the police are after you. There's a thousand dollars on your head."

"The buckboard broke down," he said dully. "The wheel broke." He looked around him, relaxed suddenly and sat down. "What's the use?" he said. "I can't get anywhere."

"Of course you can. You can get away, Jim, and start all over again. Then you can send for us."

He threw her arm away roughly.

"I'm through, and you know it."

"You are if you sit there."

But his head was clearing. She went to listen at the parlor door. When she came back, he was standing up, looking more like himself. He was a handsome fellow with heavy dark hair and dark eyes, a big man as he towered above her in the little kitchen. His face did not indicate his weakness. There are men like that, broken reeds swinging in the wind, who yet manage to convey an impression of strength.

"There isn't a chance, I tell you. Go and call Cooper, and turn me over to him. Then you can claim the reward."

She ignored that. She went to the rear porch, got the overcoat and brought it in.

"By Shultz's fence, you said, Jim, and then to the railroad. The slow freight goes through on toward morning, and if that doesn't stop, there's the milk train. And — Jim, let me hear about you now and then. Write to Aunt Sarah. Don't write here. And don't think that once you get away you're safe. A thousand dollars reward will set everybody in the country looking."

He paused, the overcoat half on. His eyes searched hers furtively.

"There was a girl there," he said slowly. "She was right near when I had this run-in with that fellow. She — I suppose she's all right?"

She managed to control her voice.

"I'm sorry, Jim. You got her, too."

"Not ——?"

"She died right off, Jim."

She had expected that it would be a shock, but she was not prepared for the tortured grief which showed in his face. She had known that he was infatuated with the girl, not that he loved her.

"Clara!" he said. "Clara— My little girl!"

She stood looking at him. All his promises had meant nothing. His frenzied efforts at escape had been directed to one end, and one end only: this girl. All the labor, the scheming, so that he might escape to this girl.

He was crying now. She had never seen him cry. Great tears ran down

his face and onto his clothes. He moaned under his breath, and the tears continued to run. She stood still. Everything seemed unimportant now, the detective asleep in the parlor, his gun beside him on the table; the baby, coughing croupily above. There was no future for any of them.

"You'd better be going," she said. "You'll just about make it."

But he shook his head.

"I'm not going. Go and tell Cooper I'm here. Tell him I've come back to give myself up."

"It's as bad as that, Jim, is it? I don't mean anything, or the children? She's gone, and so you don't care?"

"I haven't a chance anyhow. Why don't you turn me over and get the reward? You could get away from me, then, and away from this hole."

"I'm not selling you, Jim."

But his mouth had set in ugly lines.

"Take your choice," he said briefly. "I'll be in the barn. You can turn me over or leave the reward to Cooper. He was always soft on you, anyhow. Maybe you'd like him to have it."

"Jim, for God's sake! I can't bear it."

He pulled himself together.

"I am not worth it, Molly," he burst out. "I am not worth a thousand dollars alive or dead, but if they're offering that for me, if you had it you could go out West somewhere and nobody would know about you. You could start the kids fresh. That's about the only thing I can do for you — give you a chance to get away and forget you ever knew me."

She was horrified. In the end she went down on her knees, pleading with him, beseeching him. But his eyes were blank, like the eyes of a dying man.

"I'll be in the barn," he said. "You can tell them. And don't let them put anything over on you. That money is yours."

"I'll die first."

But in the end she was forced into a sort of stunned acquiescence. He was determined on this final act of nobility: with her subtler mind she saw that it gratified him, that he preferred to make this last large gesture. He even planned the thing for her.

When Cooper wakened she could say she had thought the thing over, that she needed the money, that she would exchange her knowledge for the reward.

"Only you get a paper for it — get a paper from Heideger. He'll bluff it out of you if he can. He was crazy about — about her. The old fool."

That was his farewell to her. She could hear his feet cautiously crunching through the snow as he made his way to the barn.

She moved like an automaton through the house. She did not dare to think of Jim in the barn, making his final heroic sacrifice, not out of love for her, but because it no longer mattered. She knew that she would never sell him out, but she knew that they would find him there.

In the back of her mind, however, was a new and curious pride in him. He had courage, after all. He was no

weakling. Although she did not know it, this final gesture of his had renewed her faith, even her love.

She closed the door and fastened it behind him. Then very carefully she unlocked the parlor door and opened it. Cooper was still in his chair, sunk a little lower perhaps and breathing heavily, the overturned tea cup on the floor beside him.

She went back to the kitchen and filled a fresh bottle for the baby.

As before, it served as an excuse for her presence; with it on the table near at hand she trimmed carefully the rough-cut edges of the papered door. The inside of the closet was a clear betrayal. Still listening and walking softly, she got a dust brush and pan and swept up the bits of wood and sawdust from the floor. The drill she placed on the shelf, and, turning, pan and brush in hand, faced the detective in the doorway.

He made a quick dash toward the closet.

"What have you got there?" he demanded shortly.

"Don't jump at me like that. I've broken one of the baby's bottles."

She swept past him and out onto the back porch with the pan. When she returned he was smiling sheepishly.

"Sorry," he said, "I didn't mean to startle you. That tea and the heat of the stove put me to sleep. I've been half-frozen. I guess it was the bottle breaking that wakened me. I thought you said you would go to bed."

"I couldn't sleep," she evaded, "and about this time the baby always has to be fed."

She took the bottle of milk from the table and set it inside the teakettle to warm. Every vestige of suspicion had died from the man's eyes. He yawned again, stretched, compared the clock with his watch.

"It's been a long night," he said. "Me for the street again. Listen to that wind. I'm sorry for anyone that's out in the mountains tonight."

He went into the parlor and, putting on his overcoat, stood awkwardly in the little hall.

"I guess you know how I hate this, Molly," he said. "I — I — this isn't the time for talk and there ain't any disloyalty in it, but I was pretty fond of you at one time. I guess you know it, and — I am not the changing sort. I have never seen anybody else I liked the same way. It doesn't hurt a woman to know a thing like that. Good night."

She stood gazing at the door where it had closed behind him. He was a good man, and he cared for her. A woman would be safe with him. But she brushed the thought away. How could she, with Jim heroically awaiting the end in the barn? Whatever he had been, Jim was now earning her loyalty, her lasting memories.

Already, as she climbed the stairs slowly to lie down on the top of her bed, she was planning his defense against the law, selling things to raise the money, preparing to immolate herself if necessary.

"I wouldn't live with him as his

wife. I didn't want any more children. That's what drove him to her."

The jury would understand that. They would be men.

The baby cried hoarsely and she gave him his bottle, lying down on the bed beside him and taking his head on her arm. He dropped asleep there and she kept him close for comfort. She lay there, planning.

The deadly problem of the poor, inextricably mixed as it is with every event of their lives, complicating birth, adding fresh trouble to death — the problem of money confronted her. Jim had been, in town parlance, "a poor provider."

To get Jim off, and then to get away from it all! She drew a long breath. From the disgrace, from the eyes of her neighbors, the gossip, the constant knowledge in every eye that met hers that her husband had intrigued with another woman and killed her. To start anew under another name and bring her children up in ignorance of the wretched past, that was her dream. And as she dreamed it she finally fell asleep. It was at daylight that she was awakened by a light crash. The baby had thrown his bottle out of the bed.

But when she looked, the bottle was beside him and not broken. She was not frightened. The alarm clock on the dresser said four thirty, and on the minute she heard the milk train whistling for the switch. It was still very dark; a gray dawn with snow blowing like smoke through the trees.

Cooper was not in sight.

Suddenly she was desperate. The events of the night before were incredible. Jim must catch that train, get away, anywhere. He had been crazy last night, and so had she.

She ran down the stairs and out toward the barn, stumbling through the snow, running, panting. The milk train waited for ten minutes on the siding. If Jim could get there —

But halfway to the barn she saw Tom Cooper coming across the Shultz pasture toward her. He was walking slowly, with his head down. And far away, by the track, she could make out dimly a group of men.

She stood waiting patiently, the wind wrapping her cotton dress about her. She knew before the detective reached her, and she waited with the eyes of a woman who has lost her last illusion. Jim's gesture had been only a gesture, after all.

"They've got him?"

"Yes. He was crawling onto the train, and somebody saw him."

"Is he there?"

"Yes, Molly."

"I'd better go to him. He'll need somebody."

But Cooper held her back.

"He's all right, Molly. I reckon it's just as well for him. Somebody got excited, and — I guess he never knew about it."

She stood quite still. From the house there came the sound of the baby, wailing, and suddenly she turned back. Cooper said nothing. He fell into step beside her, and so side by side they entered the house.

THE ADVENTURES OF KARMESIN

by GERALD KERSH

Karmesin: Racketeer

"IDIOT!" said Karmesin, "only fools believe nothing. There are two kinds of ass. One believes all he hears. The other believes nothing. You belong to the latter species. I tell you things, and you simply listen, and afterwards laugh. I would bet that you believe less than fifty per cent of the things I have told you. Yet I pass as a truthful man."

"You *pass* as a truthful man," I said.

"Bah. I seem to remember your selling stories which I told you. You have cashed in on me. You live on me. I support you. In one of those ill-written and badly constructed pieces of literature, you referred to me as Either The Greatest Liar Or The Greatest Criminal The World Has Known. I disapprove of this."

"Um?"

"Yes. Yet if I told you that every word I said to you was true, what would you say?"

"I still wouldn't necessarily believe it."

"*Pfui!*" said Karmesin, and spat. Then he smiled. It was a smile of extraordinary softness. "But you are young," he sighed, "and therefore foolish. I knew an unbeliever like you, once."

"Yes?"

"Indeed. I met him on a cliff."

"What happened?"

"You will not believe me," said Karmesin.

"Oh, yes, yes."

"I would guarantee that you will not."

"Tell me, anyway."

"Then give me a cigarette," said Karmesin. He sat still, looking at me. It is difficult for me to express just how that steady, dark stare affected me. I felt that what he was about to say simply *must* be true. For the very first time in the years I had known him, Karmesin became desperately sad. "Listen," he said . . .

I found myself a mass of nerves. I may say that any really important man must be a mass of nerves. Only when you become *aware* that your nerves predominate in your make-up, then, my young friend, is the time to give up work and relax. I went to Rocky Centre.

Why did I go there? Because it was quiet. It was damnably quiet. There was a population of about three thousand. Most of them lived by fishing. *Bon*, I like fishermen.

Bon. One night I walked out. It

was a beautiful night; warm, calm, with a great round moon shining down. I sat on the verge of the cliff. A hundred feet down the sea licked at the rocks, and far out on the bosom of the Atlantic great patches of phosphorescence drifted and heaved.

Perhaps I dozed. It could not have been for more than five minutes. Then, when I awoke, I found that I had a companion. A man was sitting next to me: a man I did not like. He was small and thin, with a face — do you remember the rat, Medved? A face rather like that. I would not have trusted that man.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "But did I startle you?"

"Oh, no," I said.

"Lovely night," he said.

"Mm." I did not want to talk to the fellow.

"Look at the moon on the grass," he said. "It makes lights and shadows, eh?"

"Ghostly," I replied.

"Oh," he said. "Ghostly? Surely not? I don't believe in that kind of thing."

"Don't you?" I asked.

"No. Once you're dead, you're dead. Some people believe in an after-life. Not me. No such thing. I say: 'I want to *see* a thing before I believe it.' Don't you?"

I said: "I suppose so."

"If there were ghosts and things, where would we be? My goodness, we couldn't be sure of anything. For myself," he said, "I should hate to think of an after-life."

"Mm." I had to make conversation, so I said: "Live near here?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have that house over there."

"The Lodge?" I asked; and, sick or not sick, I became interested, because The Lodge was obviously the house of a wealthy man.

"Yes," he said.

I looked at him. He was well-dressed, but obviously not a gentleman. He had, indeed, something of the air of a valet — a gentleman's gentleman. He went on:

"You don't believe me, perhaps. Only right. I don't believe things I'm told. I'm an unbeliever. I only believe what I see. But the fact is, I do own The Lodge. I inherited it from old Mr. Thurston."

"Son?" I asked.

"No, valet. Kind of head cook and bottle-washer. I was everything to poor Mr. Thurston."

"Were you, indeed?"

"Yes. I pressed his clothes — not that he bothered about that, much, poor gentleman — and cooked his food."

"Hm!"

"No shame in that," he went on. "There is a poem which says 'A civilized man cannot live without cooks.' I am a good cook. I think I can cook fish better than any man alive."

"Oh," I said.

"Yes!" He looked out over the sea, pointed down and said: "See those phosphorescent bits down there?"

"Well?"

"Poison."

"What?" I asked.

"That phosphorescent stuff. It's made up of animalculae. If you baled up a pint or so of that shiny stuff and drank it, you'd die. Of course, nobody'd go and *drink* it. But . . ."

"Well?"

"Oysters can live on it. Mussels, too."

"Ah."

"Mr. Thurston liked mussels."

"Oh," I said.

"If," he said, "if a mussel ate that stuff, and you ate that mussel, do you know what would happen?"

"I can guess," I said. "One would die, I suppose?"

"Ah-ah," he replied. He looked at me again, and muttered: "Mr. Thurston liked mussels. He loved *Moules Marinières*. I used to cook it for him. Of course, he was grateful."

"Yes?"

"He left everything to me," said the little man, looking up at me.

"Congratulations," I said.

"Thanks." He was silent for a moment, then, quite startlingly said: "Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No," I said. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Yes, I was telling you. I'm a gentleman now, you know. He left everything to me. At least, he really did. Only at the last moment, there came a long-lost nephew."

"Well?" I said.

"A long-lost nephew," said the little man, with a sneer, "a great stuck-up fellow, a cheapskate."

"So?"

"The old man was glad to see him: a fellow that wasted money like water, mark you. A profligate. The old man took to him more than to me; and I'd been with him for thirty years. He thought he was good-looking. So did old Mr. Thurston. 'My handsome nephew,' he used to say."

"Well, well, well."

"Yes. One evening they wanted to eat *Moules Marinières*. I am very good at cooking *Moules Marinières*."

"Well?"

He lit a cigarette, and said: "Nobody could prove anything."

"Prove what?"

"Well, they died — the old man *and* his nephew."

I gulped. Something about that horrid little man brought a bad taste into my mouth. It was obvious. He had discovered the poisonous properties of the phosphorescent animalculae and had poisoned the old man and his nephew. "So you boiled up a nice stew," I said.

"The secret of *Moules Marinières* is frying with a bit of butter no bigger than a walnut, and some chopped parsley. *And the beards must be removed!* Not boiling. No. Well, they both happened to die. I didn't eat any, and I lived. And the original will held good, because he'd had no time to change it, and I was the heir. The house, the land, and two hundred thousand," said the valet.

"So you're a rich man," I said.

"Yes." He looked down, and shuddered. "Horrible rocks," he said, "horrible, horrible rocks. If you fell

down on them they'd tear you to pieces like a dog's teeth."

"I can imagine it."

"It wouldn't hurt much, either."

I looked straight into his eyes. He had hideous little eyes which seemed to shine. "I think you're a murderer," I said.

"No," he replied. "No. Not a . . . Well. Some people would be afraid of murder on account of ghosts and after-life and other such nonsense. But not me. When you're dead, you're dead. Eh?"

I said nothing.

He went on: "Well, I inherited. But it's lonely here."

"With murder on your conscience," I said.

He became angry. "What if I did? What if I did kill them? Who could prove it? And there's nothing to punish a man if the law can't prove it, is there?"

"I don't know," I said.

"But I do! There's nothing. When you're dead, you're dead. I can tell you that. I *believe* it!"

"So," I said.

He was silent. The moon shone down on him. The waves licked the rocks and over everything there was the hissing of the sea.

Suddenly he spoke again: "There's one thing I can't understand."

"Oh? What?"

"Just one thing. When you're dead, you're dead — I know that. But there's just one thing. You know . . ." He stopped, and his face underwent a horrible change.

"Well, what?" I asked.

"You know everybody dies," he said.

"Certainly everybody dies," I said.

"But I can't! I can't die!"

I stared. He looked back, with all hell in his eyes, and said: "Look!"

And before I had time to step forward and stop him, *he walked right over the edge of the cliff!*

I am not a nervous man, but it was ten or fifteen seconds before I could bring myself to look down. I could see no sign of him: nothing but the rocks and the long swell of the sea.

Karmesin stopped. "What did you do then?" I asked.

"I went to the town and yelled murder," he said. "I told them how a man had jumped over a cliff. They laughed at me. 'A little thin man in a black suit?' they asked. I agreed. 'Why,' they said, 'lots o' people see that. That's little Henry, old Mr. Thurston's valet, who died thirteen years ago come Michaelmas.'

"That's all," said Karmesin. "I suppose you won't believe this, too. I admit that I was sick, with nerves, and I also admit that I had been asleep for a few minutes. You will say that it was all a dream. But it was true. And the disbelief of fools never alters facts. Lend me a cigarette. I don't feel too good."

He finished his cigarette before I spoke to him again. "That," I said, "is quite a conventional ghost story. But I admit that I like the touch about the incredulity of the ghost it-

self. What happened after that? Did you go back?"

Karmesin looked at me. His large eyes rolled round. "What do you take me for?" he asked. "A fool?"

"It must have been frightening," I said.

He laughed. "I ought to have mentioned that I am practically devoid of fear. The next night I went back, and again the little man appeared. This time, I said to him, 'Sit down, my friend. Permit me to do some of the talking.' And so he sat down and waited.

"'Now, listen,' I said to him. 'Unbelief is all very well, within its logical limits. *Bon.* You do not believe in ghosts. Good. Yet the fact remains that you are a ghost yourself, since you died a considerable time ago. Why try to fool yourself, my ghostly friend? Why try to fool me? Do you realize with whom you are dealing? I,' I said, 'am Karmesin. You must have heard of me. I have cleaned up more heavy capital out of scientifically-organized crime than any man in the history of the world. *Bon.* Then listen to my proposition . . .'"

When the ghost realized who I was [continued Karmesin] I don't mind telling you that he was terrified of me. "Why?" I asked, "should you waste your time jumping over cliffs when you know perfectly well that you can't hurt yourself. Why be selfish? Why devote your nights to purely selfish suicidal attempts when you might be useful to your fellow-men? I beg your pardon, to those who used to be your fellow-men? Let us get together." He was not insensible of the honor I was conferring on him — I, who rarely used accomplices. "Let us go into business together," I said.

We talked all night. In the morning I went to see Mr. Kildare, an estate-agent. The Lodge, a most beautiful old medieval house, was empty. I rented it, fully furnished, at a very low price. Then, making contact with a wealthy American who was living at that time in London, I offered to sublet The Lodge to them at a fantastically high rental, guaranteeing them a nightly manifestation of a hideous little ghost.

The American gentleman was delighted, but wanted to see the ghost before he signed the agreement. I invited him to The Lodge for a night, and let him see for himself. It worked beautifully. At six thirty in the evening he was horrified to see my little Henry glide across the room carrying a phantom pair of trousers. At eleven fifteen, when he was going to bed, he jumped a foot into the air as the icy little fingers of my Henry undid his bow tie for him.

"Okay, I'll take the place," he said. "What's your price?"

"Two thousand pounds for the summer."

"Two thousand pounds hell."

"Think how you can astonish your friends," I said.

"Right, I'll take it."

And he duly moved in.

Now, there were certain unpleasant aspects of Henry's character which I had failed to observe: he caused the cook to fly into hysterics by chucking her under the chin, and used to quarrel violently with the second footman below stairs. Again, no brandy was safe with Henry around, and on more than one occasion my tenant was annoyed to observe cigars floating through the air, obviously stolen from his cabinet.

But on the whole everybody was satisfied; especially when Henry grinned over the shoulder of the Duke of Tisket and Tasket as that progressive young nobleman was cleaning his teeth one Saturday night.

Yet things were not going quite as I had anticipated. I had meant to use Henry in a vast organization of hauntings. I meant to take several villas, castles, and granges, and to arrange for a genuine haunting once every night. A ghost can travel fast: time and space are as nothing to him. I was arranging to rent The Shambles, Dorking, for John J. Gilly, the automobile magnate, who was distinctly interested. But Henry had become unreliable. He spent all his time in The Lodge, scarcely moving out of doors. I reasoned with him: the constant lack of fresh air, I argued, must be very bad for his health . . . But no.

I was puzzled, until the night of June 8th, when I was staying at The Lodge as the guest of my tenant. I could not sleep. I told you that my nerves were bad. At two in the morning I went downstairs to the library for a book. As I approached the door I heard voices: Henry's reedy little voice and that of a woman. I looked in. Imagine my surprise when I saw Henry, sitting on a sofa, making himself very comfortable with the master's brandy and cigars, with his arm about the waist of a lady in sixteenth-century dress, who was coyly holding her head underneath her left arm, sometimes lifting it up in order to whisper and giggle in his ear!

The miserable wretch had fallen madly in love with the spectre of Lady Jane Yule, who had been decapitated in the reign of Henry VIII, and who had been haunting The Lodge ever since! It was in vain that I pleaded with them, saying that respectable ghosts, like respectable servants, might quite easily haunt in couples, provided that they were properly married. But no. The Lady Jane would not hear of it. Go into service? She lifted her head up at arm's length in order to look down her nose at me.

My scheme had fallen through. I was not a loser by it, but my annoyance was very bitter indeed, my friend. Never hire accomplices, I warn you: they always let you down. I had to leave shortly afterwards to attend to the affair of the Cassidy Emeralds. And it was not until two years later that I learned how my tenant had lured Henry and the Lady Jane to America with some absurd promise connected with a company directorship.

Discussing "thrillers" in her interview with "The New York Times," during her visit to America last year, Margery Allingham said: "The thriller has a very different reputation in America from what it has in England. I imagine it's a bit down here. In England there is actually a snobbery for the thriller, especially in the universities and among our statesmen."

Then Margery Allingham selected seven novels which she considered "the best thrillers of modern vintage." Here are the titles:

Dorothy L. Sayers's MURDER MUST ADVERTISE
A. E. W. Mason's AT THE VILLA ROSE
Mabel Seeley's THE CRYING SISTERS
Jonathan Latimer's THE DEAD DON'T CARE
E. C. Bentley's TRENT'S LAST CASE
Georges Simenon's THE MAN WHO WATCHED THE TRAINS GO BY
Earl Derr Biggers's THE BLACK CAMEL

We find this list a curious and paradoxical one — chiefly because we are not at all clear as to how Margery Allingham distinguishes a thriller from what we call a detective story — or whether the two terms are synonymous in Margery's lexicon of the lethal and the larcenous. But on one score we do disagree: by any name or label, we would not rank Mason's AT THE VILLA ROSE *as the greatest of the Hanaud novels. Our vote would go, without the slightest reservation, to* THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW, *which in our opinion is Mason's masterpiece.*

Now, here is one of the "unknown" Hanaud short stories we promised you. A 24-carat discovery for mystery fans and Mason aficionados alike, this Hanaud story, incredible as it may seem, has never before been published in the United States.

THE GINGER KING

by A. E. W. MASON

MONSIEUR HANAUD was smoking one of Mr. Ricardo's special Havanas in the dining-room of Mr. Ricardo's fine house in Grosvenor Square. The trial which had fetched him over from Paris had ended that morning. He had eaten a very good lunch with his friend; he had taken the napkin down from his collar; he was at his ease; and as he smoked, alas! he preached.

"Chance, my friend, is the detective's best confederate. A little unimportant word you use and it startles — a strange twist of character is provoked to reveal itself — an odd inci-

dent breaks in on the routine of your investigation. And the mind pounces. 'Ping,' you say, if you play the table-tennis. 'Pong,' you say, if you play the Majohn. And there you are! In at the brush."

"I beg your pardon?"

For the moment Mr. Ricardo was baffled.

"I said, 'You are in at the brush,' " Hanaud repeated amiably.

Mr. Ricardo smiled with indulgence. He too had eaten his share of an admirable saddle of lamb and drunk his half of a bottle of exquisite Haut Brion.

"You mean, of course, that you are in at the death," he said.

"No, no," Hanaud protested, starting forward. "I do not speak of executions. Detectives are never present at executions and, for me, I find them disgusting. I say, you are in at the brush. It is an idiom from your hunting field. It means that when all the mess is swept up, you are *there*, the Man who found the Lady under the thimble."

Mr. Ricardo was in no mood to pursue his large friend through the winding mazes of his metaphors.

"I am beginning to understand you," he answered with some resignation.

"Yes." Hanaud nodded his head complacently. "I speak the precision. It is known."

With a gentle knock, Mr. Ricardo's incomparable butler Thomson entered the room.

"A Mr. Middleton has called," he said, offering to Ricardo a visiting-card upon a salver.

Ricardo waved the salver away.

"I do not see visitors immediately after luncheon. It is an unforgivable time to call. Send him away!"

The butler, however, persisted.

"I took the liberty of pointing out that the hour was unseasonable," he said, "but Mr. Middleton was in hopes that Monsieur Hanaud was staying with you. He seemed very anxious."

Ricardo took up the card reluctantly. He read aloud.

"Mr. John Middleton, Secretary of the Unicorn Fire Insurance Company . . . I am myself insured with that firm." He turned towards his guest. "No doubt he has some reason to excuse him. But it is as you wish."

Monsieur Hanaud's strange ambition that afternoon was to climb the Monument and see the Crown Jewels at the Tower, but his good nature won the day and since he was to find more than one illustration of the text upon which he had been preaching, he never regretted it.

"I am on view," he said simply.

"We will see Mr. Middleton in the Library," said Mr. Ricardo; and into that spacious dormitory of deep armchairs and noble books Mr. Middleton was introduced. Hanaud was delighted with the look of him. Mr. Middleton was a collector's piece of Victorian England. Middle-aged, with dangling whiskers like lappets at the sides of an otherwise clean-shaven face, very careful and a trifle old-maidish in his

speech, he had a tittering laugh and wore the long black frock-coat and the striped trousers which once made the City what it was. He was wreathed in apologies for his intrusion.

"My good friend, Superintendent Holloway of Marlborough Street, whose little property is insured with us, thought that I might find you at Mr. Ricardo's house. I am very fortunate."

"I must return to Paris tomorrow," Hanaud replied. "For this afternoon I am at your service. You will smoke?"

From his pocket Hanaud tendered a bright blue packet of black stringy cigarettes, and Mr. Middleton recoiled as if he had suddenly seen a cobra on the carpet ready to strike.

"Oh, no, no!" he cried in dismay. "A small mild cigar when the day's work is done. You will forgive me? I have a little story to tell."

"Proceed!" said Hanaud graciously.

"It is a Mr. Enoch Swallow," Mr. Middleton began. "I beg you not to be misled by his name. He is a Syrian gentleman by birth and an English gentleman by naturalization. But again I beg you not to be misled. There is nothing of the cunning of the Orient about him. He is a big plain simple creature — a peasant, one might say — as honest as the day. And it may be so."

"He has a business, this honest man?" Hanaud asked.

"He is a furrier."

"You begin to interest me," said Hanaud.

"A year ago Enoch Swallow fitted up for his business a house in Berwick Street towards the Oxford Street end of that long and narrow thoroughfare. The ground-floor became his showrooms; he and his wife, with a cook-general to wait on them, occupied the first floor; and the two storeys above were elaborately arranged for his valuable stock. Then he came to us for an insurance policy."

"Aha!" said Monsieur Hanaud.

"We hesitated," continued Mr. Middleton, stroking one of his side-whiskers. "Everything was as it should be — the lease of the house, compliance with the regulations of the County Council, the value of the stock, mink, silver fox, sables — all correct and yet we hesitated."

"Why?" asked Hanaud.

"Mind, I make no suggestion." Mr. Middleton was very insistent upon his complete detachment. "It was held to be an accident. The *Société Universelle* paid the insurance money. But Mr. Enoch Swallow did have a fire in a similar establishment on the Boulevard Haussmann in Paris three years before."

"Enoch Swallow? The Boulevard Haussmann?" Hanaud dived deep among his memories but came to the surface with empty hands. "No, I do not remember. There was no case."

"Oh, dear me, no," Mr. Middleton insisted. "Oh, none at all. Fires happen, else why does one insure? So in the end — it is our business, and competition is severe, and nothing could have been more straightforward than

the conduct of our client — we insured him."

"For a large sum?"

"For twenty-five thousand pounds."

Hanaud whistled. He multiplied the amount into francs. It became milliards.

"For a Syrian gentleman, even if he is now an English gentleman, it is a killing."

"And then last night it all happens again," cried Mr. Middleton, giving his whisker a twist and a slap. "Would you believe it?"

"I certainly would," replied Hanaud, "and without bringing the least pressure upon my credulity."

Mr. Middleton raised a warning hand.

"But, remember please, there is no accusation. No. All is aboveboard. No smell of gasoline in the ruins. No little machine with an alarm clock. Nothing."

"And yet . . ." said Hanaud with a smile. "You have your little thoughts."

The Secretary tittered.

"Monsieur Hanaud," he said coyly, "I have in my day been something of a dasher. I went once to the Moulin Rouge. I tried once to smoke a stringy black cigarette from a blue packet. But the strings got between my teeth and caused me extreme discomfort. Well, today I have Mr. Enoch Swallow between my teeth."

Mr. Ricardo, who all this time had been sitting silent, thought it a happy moment to make a little jest — that if the Secretary swallowed Mr. Swallow, he would suffer even more discomfort. But though Middleton tittered dutifully, Hanaud looked a thousand reproaches and Mr. Ricardo subsided.

"I want to hear of last night," said Hanaud.

"It was the cook-general's night out. She had permission, moreover, to stay the night with friends at Balham. She had asked for that permission herself. No hint had been given to her that her absence would be welcome. Her friends had invited her and she had sought for this leave on her own initiative.

"Well, then," continued Mr. Middleton, "at six o'clock she laid a cold supper for the Swallows in the dining-room and took an omnibus to Balham. The employees had already gone. The showrooms were closed, and only Enoch Swallow and his wife were left in the house. At seven those two ate their supper and after locking the front door behind them went to a movie in Oxford Street where a French film was being shown.

"They arrived at the movie a few minutes past eight. There was no doubt whatever about that. For they met the Manager, with whom they were acquainted, in the lobby and talked with him while they waited for the earlier performance to end and its audience to disperse. They had seats in the Grand Circle and there the Manager found them just before eleven o'clock, when he brought them the news that their premises were on fire."

"Yes, the incontestable alibi," said Hanaud. "I was waiting for him."

"They hurried home," Middleton resumed, but Hanaud would not allow the word.

"Home? Have such people a home? A place full of little valueless treasures which you would ache to lose? The history of your small triumphs, your great griefs, your happy hours? No, no, we keep to facts. They had a store and a shop and a lodging, and they come back and it is all in flames. Good! We continue. When was this fire first noticed?"

"About half-past nine, a passer-by saw the smoke curling out from the door. He crossed the street and he saw a flame shoot up and spread behind a window — he thinks on the first floor. But he will not swear that it wasn't on the second. It took him a few minutes to find one of the red pillars where you give the alarm by breaking the glass. The summer has been dry, all those painted pine shelves in the upper storeys were like tinder. By the time the fire brigade arrived, the house was a bonfire. By the time the Swallows were discovered in the movie and ran back to Berwick Street, the floors were crashing down. When the cook-general returned at six thirty this morning, it was a ruin of debris and tottering walls."

"And the Swallows?" Hanaud asked.

"They had lost everything. They had nothing but the clothes they were wearing. They were taken in for the night at a little hotel in Percy Street."

"The poor people!" said Hanaud with a voice of commiseration and a face like a mask. "And how do they explain the fire?"

"They do not," said Middleton. "The good wife she weeps, the man he is distressed and puzzled. He was most careful, he says, and since the fire did not start until some time after he and his wife had left the house, he thinks some burglar is to blame. Ah, yes!" and Mr. Middleton pushed himself forward on his chair. "There is a little something. He suggests — it is not very nice — that the burglar may have been a friend of the cook-general. He has no evidence. No. He used to think her a simple, honest, stupid woman and not a good cook, but now he is not sure. No, it is not a nice suggestion."

"Yes, such suggestions are not nice. You have seen him?" asked Hanaud.

"Of course," cried Mr. Middleton, and he edged so much more forward in his chair that it seemed he must topple off. "And I should esteem it a favor if you, Monsieur Hanaud and your friend Mr. Ricardo" — he gathered the derelict Ricardo gracefully into the council — "would see him too."

Hanaud raised his hands in protest.

"It would be an irregularity of the most extreme kind. I have no place in this affair. I am the smelly outsider." And by lighting one of his acrid cigarettes, he substantiated his position.

Mr. Middleton waved the epithet and the argument away. He would

never think of compromising Monsieur Hanaud. He meant "see" and not examine, and here his friend Superintendent Holloway had come to his help. The Superintendent had also wished to see Mr. Enoch Swallow. He had no charge to bring against Swallow. To Superintendent Holloway, as Superintendent, Enoch Swallow was the victim of misfortune — insured, of course, but still a victim. None the less the Superintendent wanted to have a look at him. He had accordingly asked him to call at the Marlborough Police Station at five o'clock.

"You see the Superintendent has a kindly reason for his invitation. Mr. Swallow will be grateful and the Superintendent will see him. Also, you, Monsieur Hanaud, from the privacy of the Superintendent's office can see him too and perhaps — who knows — a memory may be jogged?"

Mr. Middleton stroked a whisker and smiled ingratiatingly.

"After all, twenty-five thousand pounds! It is a sum."

"It is the whole multiplication table," Hanaud agreed.

He hesitated for a moment. There was the Monument, there were the Crown Jewels. On the other hand, he liked Mr. Middleton's polite engaging ways; he liked his whiskers and his frock-coat. Also, he too would like to see the Syrian gentleman. For . . .

"He is either a very honest unlucky man, or he has a formula for fireworks." Hanaud looked at the clock. It was four.

"We have an hour. I make you a proposal. We will go to Berwick Street and see these ruins, though that beautiful frock-coat will suffer."

Mr. Middleton beamed. "It would be worth many frock-coats to see Monsieur Hanaud at work," he exclaimed and thereupon Mr. Ricardo made rather tartly — for undoubtedly he had been neglected — his one effective contribution to this story.

"But the frock-coat won't suffer, Mr. Middleton. Ask Hanaud! It will be in at the brush."

To north and south of the house, Berwick Street had been roped off against the danger of those tottering walls. The Salvage Company had been at work since the early morning, clearing the space within, but there were still beams insecurely poised overhead, and a litter of broken furniture and burned furrier's stock encumbered the ground. Middleton's pass gave them admittance into the shell of the building. Hanaud looked around with the pleased admiration of a connoisseur for an artist's masterpiece.

"Aha!" he said brightly. "I fear that Misters the Unicorn pay twenty-five thousand pounds. It is of an admirable completeness, this fire. We say either 'What a misfortune' or 'What a formula!' "

He advanced, very wary of the joists and beams balanced above his head, but shirking none of them. "You will not follow me, please," he said to Ricardo and Middleton. "It

is not for your safety. But, as my friend Ricardo knows, too many cooks and I'm down the drain."

He went forward and about, mapping out the lie of the rooms from the fragments of inner walls. Once he stopped and came back to the two visitors.

"There was electric light, of course," he said rather than asked. "I can see here and there plugs and pipes."

"There was nothing but electric light and power," Middleton replied firmly. "The cooking was done on an electric stove and the wires were all carried in steel tubes. Since the store and the stock were inflammable, we took particular care that these details were carried out."

Hanaud returned to his pacing. At one place a heavy iron bath had crashed through the first floor ceiling to the ground, its white paint burned off and its pipes twisted by the heat. At this bath he stopped again, raised his head into the air and sniffed, then bent down towards the ground and sniffed again. He stood up again with a look of perplexity upon his face, a man trying to remember, yet completely baffled. He moved away from this centre in various directions, as though he was walking outwards along the spokes of a wheel, but he always came back to it. Finally, he stooped and began to examine some broken lumps of glass which lay about and in the bath. It seemed to the watchers that he picked one of these pieces up, turned it over in his hands, held it beneath his nose, and finally put it away in one of his pockets. He returned to his companions.

"We must be at Marlborough Street at five," he said. "Let us go!"

Mr. Ricardo, at the rope-barrier, signaled to a taxi. They climbed into it, and sat in a row, both Middleton and Ricardo watching Hanaud expectantly, Hanaud sitting between them very upright with no more expression upon his face than has the image of an Egyptian King. At last he spoke.

"I tell you something."

A sigh of relief broke from Mr. Middleton. Mr. Ricardo smiled and looked proud. His friend was certainly the Man who found the Lady under the thimble.

"Yes, I tell you. The Syrian gentleman has become an English gentleman. He owns a bath."

Mr. Middleton groaned. Ricardo shrugged his shoulders. It was a deplorable fact that Hanaud never knew when not to be funny.

"But you smelled something," said Mr. Middleton reproachfully.

"You definitely sniffed," said Ricardo.

"Twice," Mr. Middleton insisted.

"Three times," replied Hanaud.

"Ah!" cried Ricardo. "I know. It was gasoline."

"Yes," exclaimed Mr. Middleton excitedly. "Gasoline stored secretly in the bath."

Hanaud shook his head,

"Not 'arf," he said. "No, but perhaps I sniff," and he laid a hand upon an arm of each of his companions,

"a formula. But here we are, are we not? I see a policeman at a door."

They had reached Marlborough Street Police Station. A constable raised the flap of a counter and they passed into a large room. An inner door opened and Superintendent Holloway appeared on the threshold, a large man with his hair speckled with gray, and a genial intelligent face.

"Monsieur Hanaud!" he said, coming forward with an outstretched hand. "This is a pleasant moment for me."

"And the same to you," said Hanaud in his best English.

"You had better perhaps come into my room," the Superintendent continued. "Mr. Swallow has not yet arrived."

He led his visitors into a comfortable office, and shutting the door, invited them all to be seated. Everything about the Marlborough Street Police Station seemed to Hanaud to be large. A large beautiful ginger cat with amber-colored eyes lay with his paws doubled up under his chest on a fourth chair and surveyed the party with a godlike indifference.

"You will understand, Monsieur Hanaud," said the Superintendent, "that I have nothing against Mr. Swallow at all. But I thought that I would like to see him, and I had an excellent excuse for asking him to call. I like to see people."

"I too," Hanaud answered politely. "I am of the sociables."

"You will have the advantage over me, of seeing without being seen," said the Superintendent, and he broke off with an exclamation.

The ginger cat had risen from the chair and jumped down onto the floor. There it stretched out one hind leg and then the other, deliberately, as though it had the whole day for that and nothing else. Next it stepped daintily across the floor to Hanaud, licked like a dog the hand which he dropped to stroke it, and then sprang onto his knee and settled down. Settled down, however, is not the word. It kept its head in the air and looked about in a curious excitement while its brown eyes shone like jewels.

"Well, upon my word," said the Superintendent. "That's the first time that cat has recognized the existence of anyone in the station. But there it is. All cats are snobs."

It was a pretty compliment and doubtless Monsieur Hanaud would have found a fitting reply, had not the constable in the outer office raised his voice.

"If you'll come through and take a seat, sir, I'll tell the Superintendent," he was heard to say and Holloway rose to his feet.

"I'll leave the door ajar," he said in a low voice, and he went into the outer office.

Through the slit left open, Hanaud and Ricardo saw Enoch Swallow rise from his chair. He was a tall broad man, almost as tall and broad as the Superintendent himself, with black short hair and a flat open peasant face.

"You wished to see me?" he asked. He had a harsh metallic voice, but the

question itself was ordinary and civil. The man was neither frightened, nor arrogant, nor indeed curious.

"Yes," replied the Superintendent. "I must apologize for asking you to call at a time which must be very inconvenient to you. But we have something of yours."

"Something of mine?" asked Mr. Swallow, perhaps a little more slowly than was quite natural.

"Yes," said the Superintendent briskly, "and I thought that you would probably like it returned to you at once."

"Of course. I thank you very much. I thought we had lost everything. What is it?" asked Mr. Swallow.

"A cat," the Superintendent answered, and Mr. Swallow stood with his mouth open and the color ebbing from his cheeks. The change in him was astonishing. A moment before he had been at his ease, confident; now he was a man struck out of his wits. He watched the Superintendent with dazed eyes, he swallowed, and his face was the color of dirty parchment.

"Yes, a big ginger cat," Holloway continued easily, "with the disdain of an Emperor. But the poor beast wasn't disdainful last night, I can tell you. As soon as the door was broken in — you had a pretty good door Mr. Swallow and a pretty strong lock — no burglars for you, Mr. Swallow, eh?" and the Superintendent laughed genially. "Well, as soon as it was broken in, the cat scampered out and ran up one of my officer's legs under his cape and clung there, whimpering and shaking and terrified out of its senses. And I don't wonder. It had the near shave of a cruel death."

"And you have it here, Superintendent?"

"Yes. I brought it here, gave it some milk, and it has owned my room ever since."

Enoch Swallow sat down again in his chair, and rather suddenly; for his knees were shaking. He gave one rather furtive look round the room and the ceiling. Then he said:

"I am grateful."

But he became aware with the mere speaking of the words that his exhibition of emotion required an ampler apology. "I explain to you," he said, spreading out his hands. "For me cats are not so important. But my poor wife — she loves them. All last night, all today, she has made great trouble for me over the loss of our cat. In her mind she saw it burned, its fur first sparks then flames. Horrible!" and Enoch Swallow shut his eyes. "Now that it is found unhurt, she will be happy. My store, my stock all gone, pouf! Of no consequence. But the Ginger King back again, all is well," and with a broad smile, Enoch Swallow called the whole station to join him in a humorous appreciation of the eccentricities of women.

"Right!" the Superintendent exclaimed. "I'll fetch the Ginger King for you." And at once all Enoch Swallow's muscles tightened and up went his hands in the air.

"Wait, please!" he cried. "There

is a shop in Regent Street where they sell everything. I will run there and buy a basket with a lid for the Ginger King. Then you shall strap him in and I will take him to my wife and tonight there will be no unpleasantness. One little moment!"

Mr. Enoch Swallow backed out of the entrance and was gone. Superintendent Holloway returned to his office with all the geniality gone from his face. He was frowning heavily.

"Did you ever see that man before, Monsieur Hanaud?" he asked.

"Never," said Hanaud decisively.

The Superintendent shook his head.

"Funny! That's what I call him. Yes, funny."

Mr. Ricardo laughed in a superior way. There was no problem for him.

" 'Some that are mad if they behold a cat,' " he quoted. "Really, really, our William knew everything."

Monsieur Hanaud caught him up quickly.

"Yes, this Enoch Swallow, he hates a cat. He has the cat complex. He grows green at the thought that he must carry a cat in a basket — yes. Yet he has a cat in the house, he submits to a cat which he cannot endure without being sick, because his wife loves it! Do you think it likely? Again I say, 'not 'arf'."

A rattle and creak of wickerwork against the raised flap of the counter in the outer office announced Enoch Swallow's return.

The Superintendent picked up the Ginger King and walked with it into the outer office. Mr. Ricardo, glancing through the open doorway, saw Mr. Swallow's dark face turn actually green. The Sergeant at the desk indeed thought that he was going to faint, and started forward. Enoch Swallow caught hold of himself. He held out the basket to the Sergeant.

"If you will put him into it and strap the lid down, it will be all right. I make myself ridiculous," he said with a feeble attempt at a smile. "A big strong fellow whose stomach turns over at the sight of a cat. But it is so."

The Ginger King resented the indignity of being imprisoned in a basket. It struggled and spat and bit, but the Superintendent and the Sergeant between them got it strapped down at last.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, sir," said Holloway. "I'll send the little brute by one of my men round to your hotel — Percy Street, wasn't it? — and then you won't be bothered with it at all."

But Enoch wouldn't hear of putting the station to so much trouble.

"Oh, no, no! You are kindness itself, Superintendent. But once he is in the basket, I shall not mind him. I shall take him home at once and my wife will keep him away from me. It is all right. See, I carry him."

Enoch Swallow certainly did carry him, but very gingerly and with the basket held well away from his side.

"It would be no trouble to send him along," the Superintendent urged, but again the Syrian refused and with the same vehemence which he had

shown before. The Police had its work to do. It would humiliate him to interfere with it for so small a reason.

"I have after all not very far to go," and with still more effusive protestations of his gratitude, he backed out of the Police Station.

The Superintendent returned to his office.

"He wouldn't let me send it home for him," he said. He was a very mystified man. "Funny! That's what I call it. Yes, funny." He looked up and broke off suddenly. "Hallo! Where's Monsieur Hanaud gone to?"

Both Middleton and Ricardo had been watching the scene in the outer office through the crack in the door. Neither of them had seen or heard Hanaud go. There was a second door which opened on the passage to the street and by that second door Hanaud had slipped away.

"I am sorry," said the Superintendent a little stiffly. "I should have liked to have said goodbye to him."

The Superintendent was hurt and Mr. Ricardo hastened to reassure him.

"It wasn't discourtesy," he said staunchly. "Hanaud has manners. There is some reason."

But Superintendent Holloway thought it funny. Yes, that's what he thought it. Funny. And he so continued to think it, until a day later a charming little note of apology reached and assuaged him.

Middleton and Ricardo returned to the latter's house in Grosvenor Square and there, a little more than an hour afterwards, Hanaud rejoined them. To their amazement he was carrying Enoch Swallow's basket, and from the basket he took out a contented, purring, gracious Ginger King.

"A little milk, perhaps?" Hanaud suggested. And having lapped up the milk, the Ginger King mounted a chair, turned in his paws under his chest, and once more surveyed the world with indifferent eyes.

Hanaud explained his sudden departure.

"I could not understand why this man who could not abide a cat refused to let the Superintendent send it home for him. No, however much he shivered, he would carry it home himself. I had a little thought in my mind that he didn't mean to carry it home at all. So I slipped out into the street and waited for him, and followed him. He had never seen me. It was as easy as the alphabet. He walked in a great hurry down to the Charing Cross Road and past the Trafalgar Square and along the Avenue of Northumberland. At the bottom of the Avenue of Northumberland there is — what? Yes, you have guessed him. The river Thames. 'Aha,' I say to myself, 'my friend Enoch, you are going to drown the Ginger King. But I, Hanaud, will not allow it. For if you are so anxious to drown him, the Ginger King has something to tell us.'

"So I close up upon his heels. He crossed the road, he leaned over the parapet, swinging the basket carelessly in his hand as though he was thinking of some important matter and not

of the Ginger King at all. He looked on this side and that, and then I slip my hand under the basket from behind and I say in his ear:

" 'Sir, you will drop that basket, if you don't look out.'

"Enoch, he gave a great jump and he drop the basket, this time by accident. But my hand is under it. Then I take it by the handle, I make a bow, I hand it to him, I say 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume,' and lifting my hat, I walk away. But not so far. I see him black in the face with rage. But he dare not try the river again. He thinks for a little. Then he crosses the road and dashes through the Underground Station. I follow as before. But now he has seen me. He knows my dial," and at Middleton's surprised expression, he added, "my face. It is a little English idiom I use. So I keep farther back, but I do not lose him. He runs up that steep street. Halfway up he turns to the right."

"John Street," said Mr. Ricardo.

"Halfway up John Street, there is a turning to the left under a building. It is a tunnel and dark. Enoch raced into the tunnel. I follow, and just as I come to the mouth of it, the Ginger King comes flashing out like a strip of yellow lightning. You see. He could not drown him, so in the dark tunnel he turns him loose with a kick. The Ginger King is no longer, if he ever was, the pet of the sad Mrs. Swallow. He is just a stray cat. Dogs will set on him, no one will find him, all the time he must run and very soon he will die. But this time he does not need to run. He sees or smells a friend, Hanaud of the Sûreté, that joke, that comic — eh, my friend?" and he dug a fist into Ricardo's ribs which made that fastidious gentleman bend like a sapling in a wind. "Ah, you do not like the familiarities. But the Ginger King to the contrary. He stops, he mews, he arches his back and rubs his body against Hanaud's leg. So I pick him up and I go on into the tunnel. It winds and at the point where it bends, I find the basket with the lid. It is logical. Enoch has dismissed the Ginger King. Therefore, he wants nothing to remind him of the Ginger King. He drops the basket. I insert the Ginger King once more. He has confidence, he does not struggle. I strap down the lid. I come out of the tunnel. I am in the Strand. I look right and left and everywhere. There is no Enoch. I call a taximan."

"And you are here," said Ricardo, who thought the story had been more than sufficiently prolonged. But Hanaud shook his head.

"No, I am not here yet. There are matters of importance in between."

"Very well," said Ricardo languidly. "Proceed."

And Hanaud proceeded.

"I put the basket on the seat and I say to the taximan, 'I want' — guess what? — but you will not guess. 'I want the top-dog chemist.' The taximan wraps himself round and round with clothes and we arrive at the top-dog chemist. There I get just the information which I need and now, my friend Ricardo, here I am with the

Ginger King who sits with a Chinese face and will tell us nothing of what he knows."

But he was unjust. For later on that evening, in his own good time, the Ginger King told them plenty.

They were sitting at dinner at a small round mahogany table bright with silver and fine glass. Mr. Ricardo between Hanaud and Middleton, and opposite to Ricardo, with his head just showing above the mahogany, the Ginger King. Suddenly, one of those little chancy things upon which Hanaud had preached his sermon happened. The electric light went out. They sat in the darkness, their voices suddenly silenced. Outside the traffic rumbled by, suddenly important. An unreasonable suspense stole over the three men, and they sat very still and aware that each was breathing as lightly as he could. Perhaps for three minutes this odd tension lasted, and then the invaluable Thomson came into the room carrying a lighted lamp. It was an old-fashioned oil affair, with a round of baize cloth under the base, a funnel, and an opaque globe in the heart of which glowed a red flame.

"A fuse has blown, sir," he said.

"At a most inconsiderate moment," Mr. Ricardo replied. He had been in the middle of a story and he was not pleased.

"I'll replace it at once, sir."

"Do so, Thomson."

Thomson set the glowing lamp in the middle of the table and withdrew. Mr. Middleton leaned forward towards Ricardo.

"You had reached the point where you tiptoed down the stairs —"

"No, no," Ricardo interrupted. "The chain is broken. The savor of the story is gone. It was a poor story anyway."

"You mustn't say that," cried Hanaud. "The story was of a thrill. The Miss Braddon at her best."

"Oh, well, if you really think so," said Mr. Ricardo, tittering modestly; and there were the three faces smiling contentedly in the light of the lamp, when suddenly Hanaud uttered a cry.

"Look! Look!"

It was a cry so sharp that the other two men were captured by it and must look where Hanaud was looking. The Ginger King was staring at the lamp, its amber eyes as red as the flame in the globe, its body trembling. They saw it rise onto its feet and leap onto the edge of the table where it crouched again, and rose again, its eyes never changing from their direction. Very delicately it padded between the silver ornaments across the shining mahogany. Then it sat back upon its haunches and, raising its forepaws, struck once violently at the globe of the lamp. The blow was so swift, so savage, that it shocked the three men who watched. The lamp crashed upon the table with a sound of broken glass, and the burning oil was running this way and that, and dropping in great gouts of fire onto the carpet.

Middleton and Ricardo sprang up, a chair overturning.

"We'll have the whole house on fire," cried Ricardo, as he rang the

bell in a panic; and Hanaud had just time to snatch up the cat as it dived at the green cloth on the base of the stand, before the flames caught it; and it screamed and fought and clawed like a mad thing. To get away? No — to get back to the overturned lamp!

Already there was a smell of burning fabrics in the room. Some dried feathery grass in a vase caught a sprinkle of the burning oil and flamed up against the wallpaper. Thomson arrived with all the rugs he could hurriedly gather to smother the fire. Pails of water were brought, but a good many minutes had passed before the conflagration was extinguished, and the four men, with their clothes disheveled, and their hands and faces begrimed, could look round upon the ruin of the room.

"I should have guessed," said Hanaud remorsefully. "The Unicorn Company saves its twenty-five thousand pounds — yes, but Mr. Ricardo's fine dining-room will need a good deal of restoration."

Later on that night, in a smaller room, when the electric light was burning and the three men were washed and refreshed, Hanaud made his apology.

"I asked you, Mr. Middleton, inside the burned walls of the house in Berwick Street whether it was lit with electric light. And you answered, 'with that and with nothing else.' But I had seen a broken oil lamp among the litter. I suspected that lamp, but the house was empty for an hour and a half before the fire broke out. I couldn't get over that fact. Then I smelled something, something acrid — just a whiff of it. It came from a broken bottle lying by the bath with other broken bottles and a broken glass shelf — such as a man has in his bathroom to hold his little medicines, his tooth paste, his shaving soap. I put the broken bottle in my pocket and a little of that pungent smell clung to my fingers.

"At the police station the cat made friends with me. Why? I did not guess. In fact, I flatter myself a little. I say, 'Hanaud, animals love you.' But it was not so. The Ginger King loved my smelly fingers, that was all. Then came the strange behavior of Enoch Swallow. Cats made him physically sick. Yet this one he must take away before it could betray him. He could not carry it under his coat — no, that was too much. But he could go out and buy a basket — and without any fear. Do you remember how cunningly he looked around the office and up at the ceiling and how satisfied he was to leave the cat with us? Why? I noticed the look, but I could not understand it. It was because all the lights in the room were bulbs hanging from the ceiling. There was not a standing lamp anywhere. Afterwards I get the cat. I drive to the chemist, leaving the cat in its basket in the cab.

"I pull out my broken bottle and I ask the chemist. 'What is it that was in this bottle?'

"He smells and he says, 'Valerian.'

"I say, 'What is valerian?'

"He answers, 'Valerian has a volatile oil which when exposed to the air develops a pungent and unpleasant smell. It is used for hysteria.'

"That does not help me, but I draw a target at a venture. I ask, 'Has it anything to do with cats?'

"The chemist, he looks at me as if I was off my rocker, and he says, 'It drives them mad, that's all,' and at once I say:

"'Give me some!'" and Hanaud fetched out of his pocket a bottle of tincture of valerian.

"I have this — yes. But I am still a little stupid. I do not connect the broken lamp and the valerian and the Ginger King — no, not until I see him step up with his eyes all mad and on fire onto the mahogany table. And then it is too late. You see, the good Enoch practised a little first. He smears the valerian on the base of the lamp and he teaches the cat to knock it over to get at the valerian. Then one night he shuts the cat up in some thin linen bag through which in time it can claw its freedom. He smears the base of the lamp with the valerian, lights the lamp, and goes off to the movies. The house is empty — yes. But the cat is there in the bag, and the lamp is lit and every minute the valerian at the bottom of the lamp smells more and more. And more and more the cat is maddened. Tonight there was no valerian on the lamp, but the Ginger King — he knows that is where valerian is to be found. I shall find out when I get back to Paris whether there was any trace of a burned cat at the fire on the Boulevard Haussmann. But," and he turned towards Mr. Middleton, "you will keep the Ginger King that he may repeat his performance at the Courts of Law, and you will not pay one brass bean to that honest peasant from Syria."

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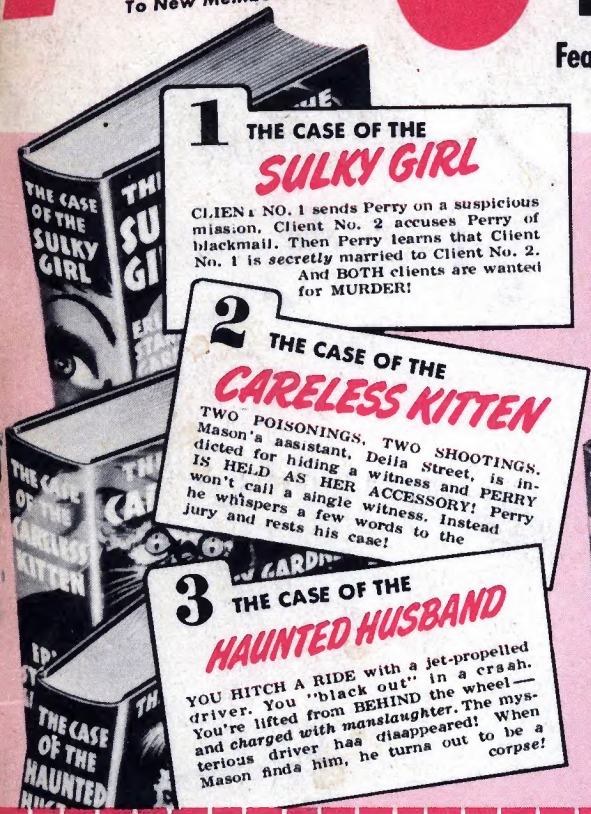

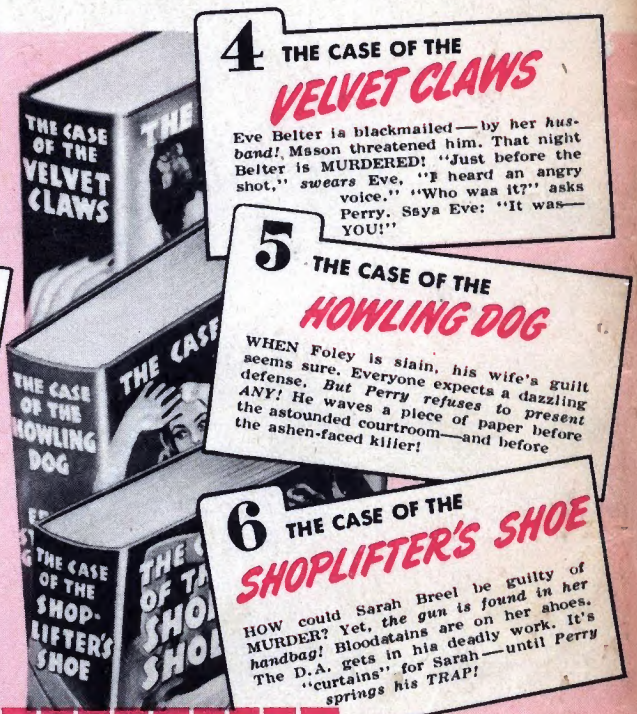

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